



The Power of the Word

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

Like me, you probably get bored by the offerings presented for our viewing pleasure on cable, satellite TV, and streaming devices. When I'm channel surfing, I occasionally stop and watch an evangelist. Depending on my mood, I might listen to what he's preaching. Other times I just marvel at

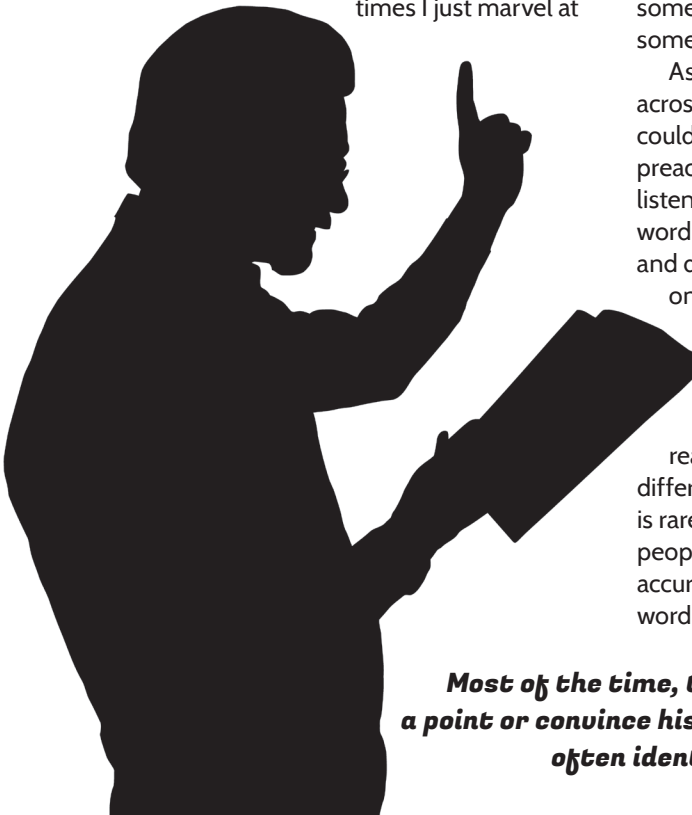
the big hairdos, the heavy makeup, the well-cut and perfectly tailored suits—and that's on the preachers, not on their wives!

As I listen to an evangelist preach and as the cameras pan the audience, I see all sorts of reactions to the preached word. Many people clap, some wave their hands in the air, others cry, and some just sit still, intently listening.

As I watch this show—and I must say it comes across more as a show than a worship service—I could conclude that it portrays the power of the preached word of God. I could observe that each listener's reaction is a demonstration of how the word is being received. I could look at each reaction and decide if the word has fallen on fertile ground, on ground that seems receptive to the power of the word, or on ground that will never yield fruit.

But I could also decide that no definitive conclusion can be made from each listener's reaction because each person's experience is different. The final harvest of the preached word is rarely fully expressed in the reactions of the people on the screen. Their behavior may not even accurately predict how they'll harvest, or use, the word in the long run.

Most of the time, the evangelist is trying to explain a point or convince his audience of a specific point of view, often identified as the word of God.



In the spiritual journey, as in all human excursions, most often there's a beginning, a middle, and an end. If we were able to look at pictures of the journey at each step of the way, we'd notice changes and development.

Some changes would be dramatic choices and actions, events, and experiences that may speak for themselves. Other changes will be subtle and not easily interpreted or understood. However, both the dramatic and the subtle compose the journey, and we need to consider all events and experiences if we want a true picture and if we seek a full understanding and appreciation.

It would be a mistake to assume that it's possible to understand the entire journey by looking at a single part of it. It's essential for understanding to look at the big picture, to appreciate each event and the experience that contributes to the whole, and then make a judgment or an interpretation. This ability to embrace the big picture is one that's well worth the effort to develop, especially for people with scrupulosity who seem to gravitate naturally, as a result of the illness, to a smaller reality and let that small experience define the bigger reality for them. We're not talking about sin or even about deliberate choice, but rather we're observing what the manifestation of scrupulosity often leads to.

This dynamic and measurable contrast is one way to speak about my observations when I watch a television evangelist preach. Most of the time, the evangelist is trying to explain a point or

convince his audience of a specific point of view, often identified as the word of God.

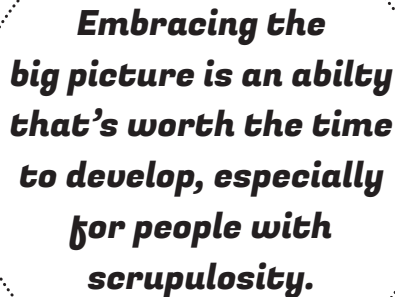
But each member of the audience hears the preached word differently. Audience members seldom are focused on the point in the way the preacher hopes for, but instead they're listening, reacting, and interpreting the word for themselves, applying it to their life and circumstances, all of which reflect where they are on their spiritual journey.

I can't tell you how many times people have commented after church about my homily, referring to a point I didn't make. I can't tell you how many times I've had someone

quote back to me, often in great detail, a particular sentence I preached that had great meaning for him or her, and I know I never said it. Nevertheless, that's what the parishioner heard, and perhaps more to the point, that's what he or she needed to hear, and that's the nourishment the word of God gave that individual at that moment in time.

Today the word of God comes to us in many different ways. Much like the audience on TV

listening to the broadcasting evangelist, each of us is also on a spiritual journey that's unique to who we are. The word we take in at any given time when we hear a sermon or a homily will speak to each of us in a different way. None of us can know for sure or accurately predict what the final result of that word will be for us, or for the community of the people of God. That's the power of the word of God, and that's the power and the grace that each of us share. ✨



***Embracing the
big picture is an ability
that's worth the time
to develop, especially
for people with
scrupulosity.***

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Midlife:

CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY



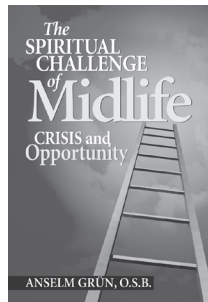
Many people between the ages of forty and fifty lose the old certainties of life. They ask about the meaning of their lives. They question their work. Until then they had exerted all their energies to build a family and establish a solid economic foundation. Perhaps they built a house. But now they begin to question who and what they did this for.

Midlife crisis is not merely a matter of adapting oneself to changing physical and psychic realities. Nor is it simply coping with the decline of physical and intellectual energies or integrating the new desires and longings that frequently emerge at midlife. Rather, it's a matter of a deep existential crisis in which the meaning of everything is called into question. Why do I work so much? Why do I wear myself out? Why do I not find more time for

myself? Essentially, midlife is a crisis of meaning and, therefore, a religious crisis. And yet, hidden within the crisis, there is the opportunity to find new meaning for one's life.

The crisis of midlife winnows the elements of human life so that one can refine and reorder them anew. From the perspective of faith, God himself is at work in this crisis. God moves the human heart to pry it open and free it from all self-deception. For believers, the crisis is not something that intrudes from the outside, where faith can be mustered as a source of power to cope with it. Rather, God himself is at work in the crisis and so, at the same time, the crisis is the place for new and intensive encounters and experiences with God. The crisis is a decisive crossroad on the path of faith. It is a juncture at which one must decide whether God will be embraced to enrich one's life and help one grow and develop—whether one is prepared to surrender oneself in faith to God and to give one's life to him.

According to Swiss therapist C. G. Jung, there can be no development of the self until one has acquired an intimate sense of the divine indwelling. The Apostle Paul's idea of God in us where "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The challenge of midlife is to let go of the narrow ego and submit oneself to God. Whoever refuses to surrender will never find wholeness and, finally, will never gain spiritual health. ✨



Excerpted from *The Spiritual Challenge of Midlife: Crisis and Opportunity* by Anselm Grun, OSB (Liguori product code 814112). To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

Mailbox

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE, LIGUORI, MO 63057 • NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q. *I read that Pope Benedict XVI said in 2008 not to cooperate with genealogy requests from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Is subscribing to ancestry resources or newspapers cooperating with LDS? What's the Church's position on this?*

A. Pope Benedict's teaching was intended to direct churches not to share their baptismal records with the LDS. The concern was because of the practice of the LDS to rebaptize ancestors, a practice our Church does not condone. Participating with a genealogical search for personal ancestors is not a concern of the Church and is a perfectly wonderful use of resources.



Q. *My family went to a restaurant for dinner called The Lusty Pig. Now I'm concerned that I may have committed a sin by patronizing a place of business with such a suggestive name.*

A. I can't imagine what kind of sin you might have committed. Is it because *lusty* is part of the restaurant's name? It seems your sensitivity is on overdrive, which is not required by any stretch of the imagination as a condition of moral responsibility.



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