

This reflection appeared first in *The Church World*, the diocesan weekly of Maine.

[<<Hub](#)

© copyright 2003 by S. Margaret Dorgan, DCM

WHERE IS MY LIFE TAKING ME?

Inspired poet that he was, Isaiah in the 8th Century sang, “All you who are thirsty, come to the water. You who have no money, come receive grain and eat. Come without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!” (55:1) This is the invitation to all human beings to stop whatever they are doing and recognize their thirst for meaning. Life-giving water is available. Grain and wine are available. Note the symbolism which points to the bread and wine that will be transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Isaiah asks a question both philosophical and economic, “Why spend your money for what is not bread, your wages for what fails to satisfy you? Come to me heedfully. Listen that you may have life” (55,1-3). “Heedfully” is the key word. How are we spending what we possess--not just our outward reserves but our inner resources? What are we pouring out of ourselves and what for? Where is our life aiming?

Five centuries before Christ was born, a homely snub-nosed man made a statement which Isaiah’s words sang in more lyrical form. That man was Socrates and he said: “The unexamined life isn’t worth living” (Apology 38a). He spoke out of a realization of his own humanity. What was the point of the existence he had been given? Where was it taking him? Why was he moving in the direction he was going?

Christ would come many years later and say: “What profit is there to gain the whole world and ruin yourself in the process? What can one offer in exchange for life?” (Mk 8:36) Socrates would have agreed. “The unexamined life isn’t worth living.” The wise Greek teacher did not let himself be carried along by the stream of events, never pausing to consider what he was part of, or the worth of it all. To those who came to him--and there were many, especially among the eager Athenian youth of his day--Socrates asked: “What is virtue?” They expected him to answer, but Socrates had no ready-made answers. He was encouraging them to face the question. How does one live virtuously? It was not his way to hand out a blueprint or a series of procedures that would guarantee success in living.

Socrates wanted his young audience to stare at the questions, to face them not only during their twenties, but in all the decades of their lives---middle age through senior years. At every stage, he was charging them to remember his statement, “The unexamined life isn’t worth living.” It was a task each one of them had to work out individually. A person could seek advice of another, listen and evaluate, but ultimately the examination of a life is the responsibility of the one who lives it.

Like Christ, Socrates was put to death for refusing to betray his own integrity. When the Athenian state laid the sentence of death upon him, his followers wept. He did not. Up until the last moment he spoke to them of virtue, of the worth of their human life. Among his concluding words were these: “If it be true that the soul is immortal, we have

to take care of it, not merely on account of the time which we call life, but also on account of all time” (Phaedo, 107).

Socrates spoke to a select group; they were all men, the upper level of Athenian society. Christ speaks to the whole world, to every human being: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). He tells His followers to be bearers of His message of hope. “The unexamined life isn’t worth living.” We are the privileged ones who have the utterances of Jesus, and on His terms we examine our existence. “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). The exhortations of Christ are not just for ourselves but for all with whom we come in contact. God said through Isaiah, “I come to gather nations of every language” (66:18).

I look at my life, where it has been, where it is now, where it seems to be headed and question myself, weighing the implications of my choices. St Augustine called Socrates’ disciple Plato “the Attic Moses.” He saw these two Greek philosophers in their native land of Attica responding to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have what they did not have: an outpouring of the Spirit through scripture and the sacraments. Christ says, “You search the scriptures, because you think in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to Me” (Jn 5:39). Where do we go with our special blessedness? Do we take time to examine our lives? “Survey the path for your feet. Then all your ways will be sure” (Pro 4:26).

The commercial world all around us is constantly telling us to weigh our choices. Do you have the best retirement plan? Is your insurance giving you all the coverage it should? Is your multivitamin pill really delivering what it promises? Advertisers are pleading with us to consider what could provide a better return. We are always assured a superior outcome. We are being pushed to scrutinize our options.

How often do we look in a mirror and appraise our reflection? We propose changes this way and that to make our appearance better. Do we gaze at the mirror of our spirit to see what needs improvement there? Do we consider what we can do to enhance the spiritual beauty within? We turn to Jesus, our model and brother. We choose new life in Him. “The love of Christ impels us.....If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come” (2 Cor: 5:14,17).

Winter in Maine is a time when we assess speed more carefully. Lent adds an insistent call to come to a halt while we measure how we spend the treasure of human living. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God” (5:7).

The apostle Paul exhorts us as he did the congregation at Corinth, “Test yourselves to see whether you are living in faith. Examine yourselves (13:5) ...What we pray for is your improvement” (13:9). The First Epistle to Timothy urges us “to build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed” (6:19) Each dawn invites us toward the future day which morning brings us. Let us not squander the hours. **“We have this confidence in God, that God hears us whenever we ask. We know**

that what we have asked God for is ours...We know too that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment....” (I Jn 5:15, 20).

Sister Margaret Dorgan, DCM