

GLIMPSE

Being Holy

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There is the old story about the holy monk who on Ash Wednesday decided to hang a huge sausage from his ceiling above his face for mortification during Lent. Each week he would lower the meaty temptation lower and lower. He could smell it and feel the grease dripping on his face. On Palm Sunday he positioned it right above his nose. On Good Friday he ate it.

In the Jesuits there are no prescribed physical penances, except the mortification of our own personal wills. To do a physical penance, we would have to get the permission of a confessor or superior. One Lenten night early in my religious pilgrimage, I asked permission to sleep without my pillow and it was granted for one night only. We retired at 9:05 and with great fervor, I laid down in quite a celibate condition. I began to think of all those holy people I had heard and prayed about who did fantastic deeds of punishing the flesh. They rolled in stickers, sat for days on nails, beat themselves with ropes. I began imagining I was numbered among such holy people. Nobody ever tried to sleep without their pillow. It was quite dramatic and felt to me so holy. This lasted longer than I had planned and I found myself unable to get to sleep I was so holy. We rose at five in the morning and it was getting near midnight. So I reached down and picked up my pillow and put down my sense of sanctification and went right to sleep. I never pulled that again. I never felt holy neither again like that; I have had very good sleeps since then.

What do holy women and men do? I think they begin by not feeling holy. Holiness does involve various forms of feelings though. Being loved is more than a feeling, though feelings of gratitude and acceptance, do arise, but are they loved when those feelings are not there, of course. Holiness is a form of humility where we receive rather than achieve. What hurts our sense of being holy is our seeking the

security by comparing ourselves with others. I remember a fellow Jesuit Novice who could keep silence. This was not one of my major virtues. This fellow wouldn't even say hello to Jesus if Jesus came by during Sacred-Silence time. I envied him and his self-control. You know what, he wasn't keeping silence, he was, by nature, shy, quiet, that's just who he was and is.

It is good to read about the old and the modern saints, but it is not good to envy or compare and do what they did in order to feel loved by God. Real holy is being who we are and not sleeping with who we are not. Generally we do who we think we are. It begins then with real-sizing ourselves. We do not size up with others, not even with Jesus. He was Who He was and is. He began by hearing and allowing what He heard to be formative of the things He did. Compara-sinning is a dangerous way of living. Holiness begins with listening humbly to who God says each is and the major penance is giving up trying to be someone else. This is a hard penance, more than not eating sausage, rolling in nettles, beating our bodies. It is a mortification of the will all right, because our wills want verification not mortification. We want to know how we are and where we are with God and God's not telling, because believing is more precious than achieving. It is just a glimpse and I'm going to bed now with my pillow and after a sausage sandwich.