

GLIMPSE

First Words

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At last Sunday's liturgy, during the quiet after the distribution of the Eucharist, a quite upset little fellow began shouting, with certainty, "No!-no!" He kept chanting this familiar word with greater sincerity and determination as his father extricated him from the assembly. It is so good that each of us in that prayerful group could not actually recall when we too were disturbances in some church, or dinner, store or vehicle. I think "no" is the second word we learn. What do you think the first word is? Maybe it is "ma" or "da", but for me the first word I learned with intensity is "mine"! Life is all about "me" until we learn about "you" out there.

I would imagine that the reason or reasons for the "no" of that lad changed as he was facing the consequences of his transgression. It all goes back to our not knowing or accepting what's good for us. We do like the familiar, the convenient, those activities we find enjoyable. My father would, of his evening, be reading the newspaper beneath the chandelier suspended from the ceiling above him. Immediately above that ceiling were my brother and I playing a game which involved our jumping from one bed to the other while attempting to toss a little pillow into a laundry box suspended from a door. The trick was that the shot was defended by the opponent and one could score only if the shot were taken during the leap from one bed to the other. Sometimes, once was enough, one of us would not only miss the shot, but also the bed, landing us on the floor right above the chandelier.

The above-mentioned father would look up, see the light fixture swinging and shout upstairs, "If you guys know what's good for you, you'll stop that." We did know what's good for us; having fun, leaping, scoring. We would stop for awhile, but begin again promising each other to not play so intensely. We were sibling rivals so of course intensity recommenced. We knew what wasn't good for us; the heavy steps clomping up toward our playing room, his arrival and all that followed. When that happened it wasn't so good for us.

In our older years, the unexpected can shake us profoundly. Upon hearing of the sudden death recently of a younger priest, one of our community-members, resulting from a heart attack, I too sadly said more quietly than the church-lad, "No, no, not Bill?". "No" is the reaction to the interruptions of what we experience as good for us. "Yes" is the response to the mysteries contained in life's interruptions. I think that I do know what things are good for me and I intend to hold on to them and keep reaching for more of them. The "them" could be people, objects, positions, relationships, and practices. They can be traditions or prejudices which allow me not to have to reflect. They can even involve religion and spirituality which can comfort us, because we don't have to let anything new or challenging come clomping into our pray room.

"Yes" is our initial response to a request to be in a relationship with the ever-inviting God. This God desires what's ultimately good for us. Faith is the humble "yes" to these invitations to walk out of the familiar, perhaps in tears, into the unknown, unexpected, and perhaps unwanted. "Yes" is our "Amen" to the really present, now, and the really present to come. There is a little lad in each of us who wants "Mine" to be any invitation which asks me to grow up and keep a clearer head and heart about what is really good for us.

It is just a glimpse, the third word learned is, of course, "Why!!!!????!!!!"