

GLIMPSE

Getting Into Things

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

The Great Hoodini was known as a man who could escape from all kinds of confinements. He could get out of especially-made handcuffs, underwater sealed boxes and buried coffins. He baffled experts with his magical escapes. He got out of Budapest at an early age, got out of his family name of Erik Weisz and continued getting out of impossible situations, but he obviously did not get out of his ultimate confinement.

A big question in life is "What did you get out of that?" Reading a book, taking a course, attending a lecture can create an expectation of something productive or advancing. It is rather mechanical, we put in a coin and we expect something to slide out meeting our desires; the product is immediate.

Relationships can be measured it seems. We go to the doctor or dentist and through that relationship we ultimately are better for the exchange, our money for their skills. Friends though are different, well, almost. What we get out of a friendship is actually, believe it or not, in a good friendship, we get ourselves. Now we can get out of a relationship, that's different. A healthy relationship is one in which the other becomes even more of her or himself and so do we. By staying in the relationship we actually get more of ourselves out of it, but not as an intended product, but a gifted offering one with the other.

Prayer, including the prayer of liturgy, is a relational reality. Many put a productional expectation on these religious practices. Some say that they don't get anything out of spending time with themselves and God. They would want a product for the time they put in doing. Liturgy becomes a dental appointment; prayer becomes a visit to the psychologist where something real, tangible, and productive is realized. Some can go to a liturgy and want to do a Hoodinesque escape as soon and as sly as possible. "Get me out of here!" is the spirit. "There's not anything here for me!" They want to get themselves out of it.

That is the very thing that is offered in prayer. The creative love of God desires to continuously give us ourselves in all the activities of life. In relationship with God, which that God initiates by the way, we get out of the encounter what true friendship offers. The product of prayer is not telling God all the ways God is wonderful. Prayer is the relationship with a mysterious Being Who desires to keep giving ourselves more deeply and reverently to ourselves. As with good friends, we spend time, not asking or demanding that we get something out of it, but by the interpersonal exchange of honesty, without any superficial expectations, friends do get more of themselves out of the friendship, but not as a intended product, but a delightful re-gifting of both.

What we get out of liturgy is a blessed self whose productivity is in the increased acceptance of that self and the increased availability to expend their friendliness with others. So what God offers each of us results in God's offering us more generously and freely to the relationships of life. It is only a glimpse and I hope you got something out of it.