

Chapter 6: Relationship with Community

Part 45: Labelling

Start with a short prayer and a time of silence. Having lived with your 'fuller' self this week, share some of your insights or experiences of God loving and caring for the whole of you. (30 minutes)

Labelling as a way of life

When we meet people for the first time, the questions that rise up in us about them are very telling in terms of the ways we relate with them, and the extent to which we label people and put them into 'boxes'. Questions like: 'What do you do?', 'Where do you live?', 'What school or university did you go to?' may all be aimed at finding out where this person fits into your life-system and whether they will be 'people to get to know better' or 'people with whom we should not waste time'. The way these questions are answered may be the basis of forming large and very general assumptions about them, with resulting labels such as interesting, boring, attractive, naive, immature and many more. Though we may not realise it, we may be interacting with different people in terms of these simplistic stereotypes.

Perhaps we have done the same with groups or communities as a whole and operate with prejudice against these people.

For most of us, this is our pattern in life, as we move from friend to friend, group to group and interest to interest, searching for that which will make us feel satisfied and fulfilled. It is the underlying theme that what appeals to our senses or our understanding is what we should be seeking.

As a general way of relating, this shows intolerance and bigotry, and when this begins to be our way of operating in our faith community, we run the risk of being those Jesus calls 'blind hypocrites', who judge others but fail to see their own poverty.

Our attitude of being independent and selective in our decision of where we want to be, and with whom, will reinforce our already strong and comfortable aspects, but it will alienate us further from the areas of ourselves with which we are out of touch. If we want to be 'saved' from our self-centred attitude, freed from the desires that drive us and supported as our being takes on a freer and fuller shape, then we must reaffirm our faith in a 'very together' God, who uses each event and interaction in our lives to draw us towards wholeness in ourselves, with God and with others. We need to stay where we find ourselves, to allow the events, whether pleasant or uncomfortable, that God in God's wisdom and mystery has organised, to work on us in order that the transformation can take place.



God is committed to loving each of us without reserve or condition. Can we not also commit ourselves to staying where we are, and allowing his transforming love to penetrate to our roots and marrow?

Reflect for 20 minutes on a person you don't like. Describe that person in detail in your journal. When you have finished, look to see if there are any similarities with yourself.

Share as you are able with the group.

At home this week, work and pray through your difficult relationships and ask God to show you what in you may be causing these negative reactions.



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