

Part 53: Whom do we Serve?

Begin as you normally do.

Whom do we serve?

Ignatius' *Principal and Foundation*, which we considered in Part 9, stresses that all things have been given us so that we will grow in our love. All that we have, therefore, is to be used responsibly to nurture and abet our relationships.

Thus our material and social wherewithal, which broadly speaking can be called our style of living or lifestyle, should be the servant of our love relationships. It should be there to give us the time and all else we need to love God, to love the people who come across our path daily and to love ourselves. This sounds nice, and we may like to think that it is the case for us, but in fact, when all is said and done, whom have we served and what have we loved? Do we love things and use people rather than love people and use things for that love?

Reflect for ten minutes on the choices we make in regard to our lifestyle: how we choose to spend our money, our time, the friends we choose and what they do for us.

Jesus speaks of the heart as being where we are based and whatever or whoever is on the throne there as possessing us. 'Where your treasure is, there your heart is also,' and 'You cannot serve both God and mammon'. (Matthew 6:19–24)

The rich young man who went away saddened from Jesus was unable to follow him because 'he had great wealth'. The problem was not the wealth but that it was on the throne of his heart. Where do we carry our wealth, as servant or as master of our relationships?

Work: Career or Calling

For many of us, our work has become our meaning and identity and as such has become our master. We cannot face ourselves without this focus and are completely at its mercy. We would not admit it, but the proof is in the living. How much of our time and effort does it consume and what does it give in return?

The work we do, apart from the fulfilment that we hope it offers us, is there so that we can support ourselves in the calling to which God has brought us. Certainly, family needs and constraints require us to be responsible and capable in our material provision, but this has its limits. However, if our work has become an end in itself, on a different track from God's calling, then it needs very careful and deep questioning or it may land us in a serious cul-de-sac.

Jesus trained as a carpenter (it seems) and Paul made tents. Though we are not all called to full-time ministry, equally we must not presume we are called to full time non-ministry work.

An all embracing question would be, 'How integrated is my everyday life and its concerns with my relationship with God and all that that entails?'



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Exercise

The following passage raises interesting questions. Reflect on it and see where you can find paradoxes like this in your life. Do not judge yourself in any way for these ambiguities, merely notice them and write them down. If you condemn these things in yourself, they will hide and not reveal to you why they are as they are. (20 minutes)

'Funny . . .

- how big R20,00 looks for the church collection, but how small when I take it to the supermarket.
- how long an hour spent with God seems, but how short it is when I'm with a friend or watching sport.
- how laborious it is to read a chapter of the Bible, but how easy it is to read 100 pages of a popular novel.
- how I can't think of what to say when I'm praying, but how easy it is to talk to a friend for ages on the phone.
- how hard it seems to learn to worship God, but easy to learn to do other things.
- how inconvenient rain is at church time, but how insignificant when there's a big sale on in town.
- how tired I feel after work when I have a prayer meeting to attend, but how unimportant the tiredness feels when I'm invited out.
- how I simply don't have the time to volunteer to do things at the church, but find the time to do dozens of 'on the spur of the moment' things.
- how bored and restless I can be when I listen to a sermon for 30 minutes, but how my attention is drawn to the TV, even with mediocre programmes.
- how unqualified I feel to teach Sunday school, but how capable I am to help at work or in other situations.

It's not funny, it simply reflects the way I am living these days, with my priorities mixed and up and a 'shoulder shrug' for God and his Church.'

(Anonymous)

This week, meditate and reflect on the parable of the talents and try to discern where you are with all that God has given you.



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