

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In essence Jesus is saying that we are to give our self completely over to God out of love for God and love for our neighbor. What does it look like when someone makes the decision to begin doing this in his or her life?

I was forced to ask this question almost 10 years ago, when I was a freshman at the University of Minnesota where I was studying geophysics, which was the profession I had chosen to pursue because it promised to offer me both a chance to travel the world and become rich. Those were my two goals in life; those were the two things which I had decided would make me happy.

Yet in the middle of that year in college, God used Fr. Tim Nolan up in Ham Lake to speak directly to my heart and force me to confront the assumptions I had made regarding what would bring me happiness and what I was supposed to do with my life. It was his 35th anniversary of being a priest, and he used that occasion to speak about the immense joy and fulfillment he had found in giving his life to God; in living the teaching of Jesus in today’s Gospel.

Here was a man who had given his whole mind, heart, and soul to God, who was among the most joyful people I had encountered, and who had impacted thousands, tens thousands, and maybe a hundred thousand people with his life and ministry. He asked the men, young and old, at that Mass to consider a vocation to the priesthood, to give their lives in service of God and neighbor with all their mind, heart, and strength. At that moment I knew that he was speaking to me; I knew that God was calling me.

I wasn’t ready to respond to God’s call yet; perhaps it was because I was immersed in the secularized culture of the U of M; perhaps it was because Fr. Nolan’s path to happiness and fulfillment was radically different than the path to happiness I was blindly stumbling along; a path that I was stumbling along precisely because everyone else was blindly stumbling along that same pathway as well, and none of us had asked if the road we were on was leading to where we wanted to go.

What is happiness? What is the meaning of my life? Where have I come from and where and I going? Is life all about me – my wants, my desires, my needs - or is it about something bigger than me?

That night I went back to my dorm room, more unsettled than I had ever been in my life. I walked into my dorm room surrounded by people who were drunk or in the process of getting drunk, with a neighbor who was most likely engaged in another intimate relationship whose casualness and meaninglessness was betrayed by the fact that he changed partners like most people changes clothes, and with a roommate who was addicted to pornography and his own meaningless relationships – to move into my own dorm room I had to kick out four women who had been sharing the room with him. Was he happy, were these people happy? Are they fulfilled, or are they just deadening the pain?

In the days and years after this homily, I have begun to realize how few of the people living in that dorm with me were actually happy. I began to realize how few of them were finding fulfillment in life. Fulfillment and happiness were always around the corner; if I do this then I will be happy, if I get this then I will be happy, yet so few of them were now pursuing a path in life that was capable of offering any sort of fulfillment or happiness. They were grasping after things that this world reveres as being capable of offering this fulfillment and happiness, and yet each time they grasped onto something it slipped through their fingers like sand.

We are the most affluent society to ever exist. We have more material goods than any other society which has ever existed. The mores and moral codes which have shaped civilizations have been torn down; people are free to do what they want, when they want, and how they want. We have no-fault divorce. We have artificial contraception. We have abortion on demand. We can shape our families into the image of the perfect families that our culture reveres. We can shape our bodies into the image of perfection that this culture reveres. Yet if happiness and fulfillment can be found in money, beauty, and worldly perfection then Lindsey

Lohan wouldn't be in jail again, George Foreman wouldn't be selling grills to make ends meet, and Michael Jackson wouldn't be dead from a drug overdose. We have grasped at and pursued everything that secularization has promised would bring us happiness and fulfillment, and we are not happy and we are not fulfilled.

Is it any wonder that the CDC published a report last week that says that the number of Americans on anti-depressants has increased by 400% over the last two decades, making them the most prescribed drugs in America?ⁱ Is it any wonder that Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in America?ⁱⁱ

If we would take the time to examine our lives, I am willing to bet that those times when we feel the most fulfilled and the happiest are not those times we are pursuing those things which the world reveres, but rather those times when we are following our Lord's the great commandment in today's Gospel; when we love our family, friends, and our God; when we give to others rather than when we receive; when we encounter the living God in prayer and in the poor; when we "love the Lord, [our] God, with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our]mind [...and our] neighbor as [our self]."

ⁱ http://articles.cnn.com/2007-07-09/health/antidepressants_1_antidepressants-high-blood-pressure-drugs-psychootropic-drugs?_s=PM:HEALTH

ⁱⁱ American Association of Suicidology