



A journal for restless minds

## SEASONINGS

*For everything there is a season*

### YOU DUPED ME!

*Foundation or stumbling block*

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek

## Seasonings

*For everything there is a season*

**L**ife and death, such bitter enemies, seldom meet with amity and grace, and yet nothing is impossible for God. Call it happenstance or serendipity, call it what you will, it would be difficult to imagine a more unlikely conjunction.

We perceive death to be the end of life—it is not—for once conceived, life bears no ending. In grief, we forget; in missing, we grieve; in sorrow, we mourn for all which we have lost. Death, chasmed deep, denies what once was seasoned well with summered joy; its foul and bitter taste does for now repel attempts to breach its cold divide.

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to*

*break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; <sup>7</sup>a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup>a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace” (Eccl 3:1-8).*



There was a certain symmetry in motion this past weekend, two bittersweet affairs which touched, with amazing grace, the hearts and minds of more than just a few. Like two ships passing in the night, their passing wakes rocked the other ever so gently, yet sufficient enough to be felt by all who were aboard.

**G**od created us in his image and likeness, male and female, to be as one flesh, to be help-mates for one another, and to remain together for as long as the two shall live.

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## You Duped Me!

### Foundation or stumbling block

Sometimes, we simply fail to see the forest for the tree. Too often we see only ourselves, thinking only of our needs, our desires, our wants. We look inside ourselves for the answers and, when the answers elude us, we blame others, we blame God, but never once do we find fault within our own self.

We ask ourselves, "Doesn't God want me to be happy?" and we glibly answer our own question: "Of course he does!" But then, doesn't that hold true for everyone, not just for ourselves?

If God really wants us to be happy, what should we make of what we hear Jesus say in the Gospel: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Denying one's self, carrying a cross, and losing one's life hardly seems the best path to happiness; more a rough rocky road, filled with ruts and potholes, resulting in much suffering and pain.

Perhaps a brief parable will serve to illustrate our self-centered blindness:

A middle-aged man had decided to divorce his dowdy wife after twenty years to marry a much younger, prettier woman. He explained his decision to his devastated wife in this way: "God wants me to be happy," he told her, "and I am no longer happy with you. I

know I will be happy with her."

Would not God want his dowdy wife to be happy as well? Yet, it would seem, as far as his wife's happiness is concerned, the man could just as well have said, "God wants me to be happy, but he doesn't give a fig for yours."

The parable illustrates common selfishness, how the callous disregard for the suffering of others too often blinds us to the truth.



Such callousness is all too familiar, such evil surrounds us everyday. What should shock us—the callous disregard for human life, the promotion of self-serving, self-centered ideologies, the immorality and evil condoned by the media and permitted by the government—no longer offend us, we have become tranquilized, numb to the pain.

These evils show us the sickness and depravity of the post-fall condition of man. We seek our own happiness, our own power, our own pleasure over the greater good, even at the cost of uncaring cruelty and utter disregard for the welfare of others.

What we would ignore is this sim-

ple truth: Happiness cannot nor will it ever be found within ourselves. A heart willing to obtain happiness at the expense of others will never find it.

We are wounded, broken, fallen creatures in constant need of healing and forgiveness. Happiness comes from healing; the love of God and the healing power of Jesus Christ. Jesus shows us the way, the true meaning of Christian love. Over the past few weeks we have heard how Jesus gradually revealed his true self to his disciples. He showed them that he was not just a teacher, a preacher, or a good friend, but the incarnate word of God, God made man, the full and complete revelation of divine love. Just last week we heard Peter say, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

This week we find Jesus attempting to prepare his disciples for what was yet to come: that for the good of all he came into the world; for the good of the world he must "suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." But they were not ready to hear it, they did not wish to hear that the Christ, their Messiah, was meant to suffer and die.

Peter was simply aghast at the notion, even rebuking Jesus for speaking such thoughts. After all, Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, with the power to avoid suffering at the hands of men. Peter tells Jesus to avoid such pain and suffering by selfishly using his divine powers.

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**F**or Jesus to do as Peter suggested would have been to act according to his self-seeking, self-centered human nature, to pursue happiness through wealth, power, and prestige. But Jesus was not only human, he was also divine, and his divine nature kept him from falling for the temptations of the devil.

Jesus knew temptation; he knew the wiles of the devil. He had been tempted by the devil in the desert and he had prevailed against him. Remember, Jesus went into the desert for a reason. He knew that the desert was a place where, stripped of all that normally nourishes and supports, the desert is where one comes face-to-face with chaos, fear, and our demons. In the desert, body and soul are made vulnerable, exposed to the chaos and every form of temptation. *"But, precisely because we are so stripped of everything we normally rely on, this is also a privileged moment for grace. Why? Because all the defense mechanisms, support systems, and distractions that we normally surround ourselves with so as to keep chaos and fear at bay work at the same time to keep much of God's grace at bay. What we use to buoy us up wards off both chaos and grace, demons and the divine alike. Conversely, when we are helpless we are open. That is why the desert is both the place of chaos and the place of God's closeness."*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Jesus snaps back at Peter's rebuke, *"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."* But is Jesus really calling Peter the devil? Well, no. This is where something meaningful is lost in the translation.

Two words found in the Greek account call for closer examination.

The Greek word used in Matthew for "obstacle" is *skandalon*, which literally means "stumbling block." Last week we heard Jesus name Simon, the Rock, the foundation stone of his church. This week, that foundation stone suddenly becomes a stumbling block.

Yet, we scarcely notice this, so shocked are we in hearing Jesus say, *"Get behind me, Satan!"* We equate Satan with the devil, but in the Greek, *satan* merely means "adversary" or "opponent."

*"Matthew (and Mark, though not Luke or John) dares to present Peter opposing Jesus in this matter of a suffering Messiah, apparently because he knows that Peter eventually learns and accepts the whole truth, and even loses his own life (in Rome) witnessing to Jesus as crucified and risen. This foundation-stone-become-stumbling-stone stands as a cautionary tale for all of us who are called to serve with authority in the Church, a reality that surely extends to parents with respect to their children and teachers with respect to students. The good news is that, by the grace of God, rehabilitation is not only possible but likely, if we pray."*<sup>2</sup>

**P**aul writes, in the second reading, urging us to *"offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship."* He admonishes us to not conform ourselves to this age, but to *"be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."* Paul tells us that the most pleas-

ing offering to God is not a dead animal but our own living bodies, not in suicidal immolation but in the way we live our lives, by using our gifts in service, hospitality and prayer for the glory of God.

**C**onforming ourselves to the will of God is, as Jeremiah complains, never the way to tranquility and peace. *"You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed."* Jeremiah suffered humiliation, was mocked and derided, so much so, that he finally told God he had had enough. But God refused to acknowledge his complaint.

*"Following Christ costs the follower. What must be paid is a willingness to let go of our hunger for security, approval, and comfort; to take up our own cross of love and give ourselves away, to abandon our images of success and schemes of self-indulgence."*<sup>3</sup>

Let us remind ourselves, as often as possible, of our limitations and failures. Let us recall what Jesus told Peter: *"You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."* Let us always conform our lives to God will and not to our own. Amen.

Homily for the  
Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
(A)  
Jeremiah 20:7-9  
Romans 12:1-2  
Matthew 16:21-27

1. Ron Rolheiser, *In Exile: The Desert — The Place of God's Closeness*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
2. Dennis Hamm, SJ, *Stumbling Stone, Burning Heart, Living Sacrifice*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
3. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Not Conforming to the Age*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

**T**here was on Saturday last a wedding; on Monday a funeral: neither directly related, although, like passing ships, each rocked the other ever so gently.

The wedding united two, as God intended, even though youth was now but a distant memory. It was a December-December joining which brought smiles of joy to all who witnessed this happy union.

The bride was beautiful, as all brides must be, even though her age betrayed her; seven decades of life and love. She had known love and loss and now love again. The groom was handsome, debonair for seventy-five, a life-long bachelor, waiting his time to love.

Their happiness was obvious, yet somewhat muted, with the knowing of another couple, married until then for fifty-three years, now separated by the passing, the death of one they had long called friend.

They, like so many who witnessed their happy union, had worked with the woman, now deceased for many years. Memories of her played across the room, pleasant notes of love and laughter, reminiscent of the loveliness now in the loving arms of God.

What pierced the heart was the love expressed for both the living and the dead. And, I cannot erase the thought of two marriages: one in its infancy, the other, a lifetime of love.

Recently, five couples were recognized for their many years together: 49, 50, 54, 56, and 66 years, a full 275 years united in love. This weekend

two marvelous friends will renew the vows they made to each other sixty-years ago.

I speak of all these couples with the greatest admiration and respect. In these times, marriage has been so disparaged and denigrated, despised by some, dismissed as unfashionable, old-fashioned or simply unnecessary by those who would usurp the will of God.

For everything which God has made there is a reason and a purpose; by his perfect love he created all that is good and ordered everything to his purpose. *"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven"* (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

*"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'"* (Genesis 1:27-28).

**G**od's plan is clear and Scripture affirms: man and woman were created for one another. *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"* (Genesis 2:18).

*"The woman, 'flesh of his flesh,' his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a 'helpmate'; she thus represents God from whom comes our help. 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24) The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been 'in the beginning': 'So they are no longer two, but one flesh'"* (CCC § 1605).

**T**o paraphrase a line from the film *"Top Gun"*, *"Man's ego has written checks he cannot cash"* and to what end, what purpose, what gain? The Preacher, son of David, called it vanity, this compulsion to be as god. *"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity"* (Eccl 1:2).

Further on we read: *"So I became great and surpassed all who were before me.... And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun"* (Eccl 2:9-11).

Our vanity has blinded us to the truth; our egos have written checks we cannot cash. Man has subverted God's will to his own ends, turning order into disorder, love into lust, selflessness into selfishness. There can be no good and true purpose to such distortion.

*"God created man and woman out of love and commanded them to imitate his love in their relations with each other. Man and woman were created for each other."*<sup>1</sup>

There is evil in the world, it surrounds us and lies within our hearts. We are born with the stain of sin written on our hearts; sin is a part of our nature and makes itself felt in our relationships with one another. The union of a man and woman in marriage is neither *"temptation free"* nor a *"sin-free zone."* It has always been

*"threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. ...*

**A**ccording to faith the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the nature of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations; their mutual attraction, the Creator's own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust; and the beautiful vocation of man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth was burdened by the pain of childbirth and the toil of work.

Nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed. To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them 'in the beginning.

In his mercy God has not forsaken sinful man. The punishments consequent upon sin, 'pain in childbearing' and toil 'in the sweat of your brow,' also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin. After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving."<sup>2</sup>

The disordered view of marriage as nothing more than a social contract, devised by man to suit his desires and his vanity, denies its true nature, for it

denies its origin and its author.

*"The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. From their covenant arises 'an institution, confirmed by the divine law, ... even in the eyes of society.' The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: 'Authentic married love is caught up into divine love.'*

Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom."<sup>3</sup>

**I**mplicit within the marriage bond is our human sexuality. It affects all aspects of our humanity, our bodies and our souls. God created us sexual beings for a purpose; our sexuality is a gift from God.

*"It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.*

*Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out."<sup>4</sup>*

**O**ur sexuality, designed by God, is ordered to a sacred and holy purpose: procreation. Sexuality becomes disordered when it is objectified.

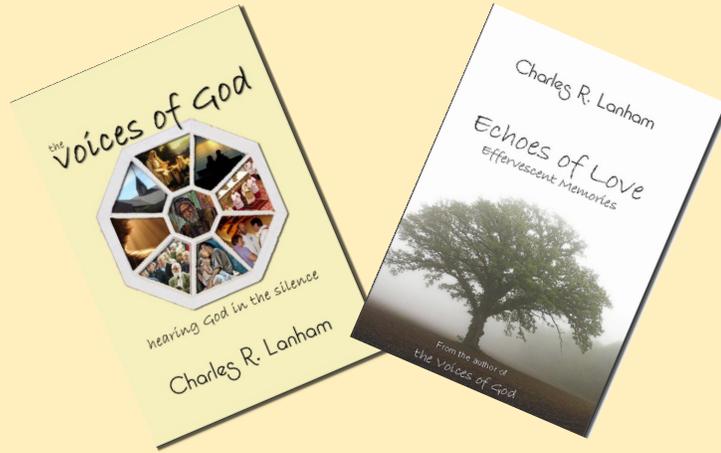
Turning love into lust, noble purpose into debauched pleasure, and bodies made in God's image into objects to be used and abused by others debases the nature and dignity of the human person. It distorts who and what we are: children of God.

*"Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. The union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.' All human generations proceed from this union."<sup>4</sup>*

Those who would argue that a lifelong commitment to another is unnecessary or an obsolete institution cheapen and denigrate such a holy estate. Such a view displays a lack of maturity and disrespect for the dignity and divine purpose of the human person. Such a view reflects an attitude of selfishness and conceit. Vanity drives them; vainglory their testament.

Marriage is more than a boast, more than self-adulation. It is the dying of one's self in sacrificial love, love of another for the glory of God.

1. USCCB, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 2006, p. 279.
2. CCC § 1606, 1607, 1608, 1609.
3. CCC § 1639, 1640.
4. CCC § 2335.



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

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