

LIVING FAITHFULLY

Living faithfully begins when something in us reaches out for “something more”; a higher power.

The Christian way begins when we accept Jesus’ message that this “something more” is God who is love, and that we are God’s beloved who are called to follow in God’s way.

This includes turning from our false selves, which are created by trusting in otherwise good things like money or power or sex, rather than trusting in Jesus—who Christians believe is God’s Son—and becoming our true selves as God’s children *who enjoy good things* like money or power or sex.

The better we are at it, the more we develop a new life which is simple, humble, and joyful.

The next step may come when, going even deeper, our true selves reach out for a closer walk with God, and develop a God-likeness characterized by self-giving and self-sacrificing love.

Its first expression is mercy; compassion for others who are oppressed by injustice or by their captivity to dehumanizing forces; by illness or natural disasters.

At the same time, they have a sense of God’s presence everywhere and in everything, and of their own lives being ones of prayer without ceasing.

And so they become peacemakers: a force for reconciliation and new life wherever they go;

And responding with forgiveness when met with persecution or rejection on the way.

All of this is not an accomplishment; it’s being led.

NOTE: this teaching reflects ^{the} Beatitudes that are found in the Bible (Matthew 5:3-10)

What does it really mean to follow Jesus? I believe we are invited to gaze upon the image of the crucified Jesus to soften our hearts toward all suffering, to help us see how we ourselves have been “bitten” by hatred and violence, and to know that God’s heart has always been softened toward us. In turning our gaze to this divine truth, we gain compassion toward ourselves and all others who suffer. It largely happens on the psychic and unconscious level, but that is exactly where all of our hurts and our will to violence lie. A transformative religion must touch us at this primitive, brainstem level, or it is not transformative at all.

History is continually graced with *people who have been transformed in this way and somehow learned to act beyond and outside their self-interest for the good of the world*. They are exemplars of public virtue. We recall Nelson Mandela, Corazon Aquino, John Lewis, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Add to them Etty Hillesum, Corrie ten Boom, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Óscar Romero, César Chávez, and many others. These inspiring figures gave us strong evidence that the mind of Christ still inhabits the world. Most of us are fortunate to have crossed paths with many lesser-known persons who exhibit the same presence.

Following Jesus is a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world.

To allow what God for some reason allows—and uses: the imperfect everything, including me!

And to suffer ever so slightly what God suffers eternally.

Often, this has little to do with believing the “right” things about God—beyond the fact that God is love itself.

Those who agree to carry and love what God loves—which is both the good and the bad—and to pay the price for its reconciliation within themselves, these are the followers of Jesus Christ. They are the leaven, the salt, the remnant, the mustard seed that God uses to transform the world.

To maintain this mind and heart over the long haul is true Gospel spirituality. I have no doubt that it takes many daily decisions and many surrenders. It is aided by seeking out like-minded people. Such grace and freedom are never lone achievements. Saints are those who wake up while in this world, instead of waiting for the next one: Francis of Assisi, William Wilberforce, Thérèse of Lisieux.