Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it” (Mark 8:35).

,Jas 2:14-24, 26; Mark 8:34—9:1)

We live in a time and culture where human fulfillment is the goal, the highest good. We want full lives. People pursue diet and exercise to perfect their bodies. They gather around them the resources and relationships they believe will make them happy and secure. But what human fulfillment consists of and how to reach it remains one of life’s mysteries.

Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life, life to the full” (John 10:10). Yet, the same Jesus also says in today’s Gospel, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Jesus spoke in parables and paradoxes. He was, after all, an Asian teacher, not Western or Greek in his thought, and Eastern wisdom is characterized by the pairing of opposites to create dynamic insight, even ambiguity rather than logical clarity. Truth is a pursuit and not a possession.

The Letter of St. James insists that thought and action must work together. Words and ideas, however eloquent and inspiring they may be, only ring true when we

experience them. Jesus' words were lived out in action. And here is where we learn that faith must undergo paradox to be complete. If we seek self-fulfillment, we quickly learn that we must surrender ourselves to something bigger and deeper than ourselves.

The paradox of the cross awaits anyone who follows Jesus. At some point in our journey, we will be asked to empty ourselves in order to be filled by God. Jesus lays down his life for his friends, then receives it back in the resurrection, new and eternal life poured out abundantly into those who have emptied themselves to receive it. They in turn pour out this life into others.

We can only know this mystery by experiencing it and seeing it others. When have we really felt fulfilled? It is when we have been in situations that have required us to risk ourselves, empty ourselves for the sake of others. We see it in people who lose themselves in the service of others. What should be loss turns out to be gain. What is given away multiplies. The grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies produces a hundredfold harvest. The small gift of a child, just five loaves and two fish, feeds the entire community.

Disciples learn by doing. How can I live this day in such a way that I come to the end of it feeling empty but joyful that I was privileged to give myself away?

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