

March 8, 2019

Dear Parents,

Happy Lent! Yes, I know that sounds odd but I do wish you a full and happy Lenten renewal experience. Again this year, I would highly recommend signing up for the Best Lent Ever through Dynamic Catholic. It's just a couple clicks (www.dynamiccatholic.com, free resources, Best Lent Ever) and you'll receive a short video message every day via email that has a quick topic, personal testimonial, and reflection question. Just before I started this letter on Thursday afternoon, I viewed the video for the day. I'll be thinking on it for (40+) days to come. The message is fairly short and sweet: God wants us to be happy. On the surface, that seems easy to agree with and understand. The video pushes further, however, and says that God not only wants us to be happy but he created us specifically for abundant life, to thrive, and to have incredible joy. No pressure. The speaker goes on to say that's why we hunger and yearn for happiness because God created *us* for *it*, not the other way around. This viewpoint is interesting and hopeful but not as easy to understand or accept, at least from my perspective. If God created us to be happy, then why don't we live in a nirvana of rainbows and bunnies? Why do we have violence, poverty, illness, and loss? The reflection question asks, "Do you really believe God wants you to be happy?" In all honesty, some days I would find that hard to answer.

As I replayed the video and went back and forth from it to this letter, I can say the following with true conviction. I believe God has a path for each of us. God knows what is best. God has marked each of us as His own and His ultimate divine plan is to bring each of us home to Him. The catch is that we also have free will. There are times when our choices change the path God has laid out for us. Our actions always have consequences, some good, some hard, some bad, some we cannot fully understand in the moment because we can't see the big picture like God does. The other detail left out of the video is that God never says finding happiness will be easy. There are situations we endure, lessons we learn, people we encounter, all purely to make us grow in some way or at the very least to appreciate the blessings we do have. Philosophically, how can you be truly happy if you've never been truly sad? How can you know relief if you've not had a problem? The video didn't say that God created you to be happy every single day-- although that's a nice goal to work on for Lent.

My conclusion then is that every aspect of our lives can be seen as having a twofold purpose: to teach us something and to bring us closer to happiness, be it earthly or heavenly. I may not always have rainbows and bunnies, but I know I do have many blessings. My head can logically list health, friends, children, home, food, clothing, job, etc. even if my heart questions their happiness quotient at times. I think that the original question should be changed to a statement with another question or two tacked on—God wants you to be happy. Period. The real question becomes: Is how you're living (work, friends, prayer life, etc.) making you truly happy? If not, why not? How can you change your practices, behaviors, or your emotional responses to make you a more positive, happier person? Answering these questions is easier said than done. In fact, it's just plain hard mental work not only to have this level of introspection but also to commit to making a change for the better.

Boom! There's our true Lenten challenge! A Lenten renewal means you have to stop and seriously consider where you are on the journey. Decide what are the truths you believe and where you need to make course adjustments. It's not a one day deal. It may not even fit within the 40 day Lenten allotment, but you have to start somewhere. You may need to seek examples, guidance, or support from others. You may have to hammer away at the same question or problem over and over until your heart opens to God's will. Remember, His time is generally not our time. The work is hard but I hear the reward is great.

Then again, what do I know? I'm just a Catholic school principal writing a weekly parent letter. I'm still traveling my own journey with my own questions. Fr. John's job is certainly secure. Nevertheless, I'm open to conversation as we travel together and continue watching the Best Lent Ever. I look forward to hearing and learning from you. May God continue to bless us all on this journey.

Wishing you Christ's peace,

Mrs. Hayslip