



‘IF YOU WISH TO BE PERFECT’

(MATTHEW 19:21)



Reflection:

December 2024

I recently met a charming young woman at a wedding reception. A social worker in a reputed firm, she had been a Jesus Youth in college and during the early years of her career. She had even attended a few sessions of the Jesus Youth formation. I was curious to know what made her discontinue, to which she said, “Well, it was demanding too much of me. So I took a break.”

The young man in the Gospel came to Jesus with a great desire for eternal life (Mt 19:16). However, he left sorrowful (v.22) because he believed Jesus was asking too much of him. This reflects the reality for many Christians today, including Jesus Youth members like the young woman mentioned above.

The goal of Jesus Youth formation is ‘perfection.’ This is God’s plan for us – “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Perfection is not about being flawless, but about striving to live out the virtues of love, compassion, and righteousness that Jesus exemplified. This call to perfection is a continuous process of spiritual growth and development, and we can only achieve it by cooperating with God’s grace.

“If you want to enter life...” is a choice Jesus offers us just as he offered the young man. As Jesus Youth, we may have made progress in the moral, intellectual, spiritual, and missionary areas of our lives. But Jesus calls us to go even deeper. In Mark 10:21, Jesus “looked at him and loved him,” then said, “You lack one thing.” He calls us to confront the one thing we lack. For the young man, it was the call to give up his worldly riches in exchange for heavenly treasure; an attachment that caused him to walk away in sorrow.

If we choose to respond to Jesus’ call, the first step is the ‘purgative way.’ In this, the focus is on cleansing ourselves from sinful attachments, committing to prayer and the sacraments, and drawing closer to God in all the circumstances of our lives. This purgative process opens our hearts to God’s love, enabling us to love Him above all else.

Perhaps we may have embraced the Jesus Youth formation with great enthusiasm and even completed several modules. Through this we are journeying through the purgative stage whereby we open our hearts ever more to God’s love and let it cleanse us from everything that dampens our love for Him. As we celebrate Formation Day 2024, what would be that ‘one thing’ that the Lord is asking us to give up in order to follow Him more closely, to love him more intimately?

In a recent session with my spiritual director, it dawned on me that my unconscious need for recognition and approval was hindering me from drawing closer to the Lord. The moment I became aware of it, I was assisted to repent of and renounce this need, leading me to experience tremendous freedom. Ever since, I have been able to dedicate an hour daily in His presence with ease; something I had longed to do for several years.

What is it that hinders us from loving Him intimately? Remember, our hearts need to be purged of every love that supersedes God. It could be our attachment to the need for approval or recognition, to some people, situations, possessions, patterns of thinking, or some of our beliefs about ourselves and others.

I hope and pray that Formation Day 2024 may be a time for each one of us to gratefully recall the many areas of growth known and unknown to us, and become aware of the ‘one thing’ that the Lord is inviting us to relinquish. May Mary, Queen of the Apostles, assist us in cooperating with His grace so that each day, we can journey towards perfection. Wish you a happy and blessed Formation Day!

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