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All Saints Parish

Rev. Fred Daley

True-Self vs. False-Self

Ray was his parent's dream son. The eldest in the family, he was a college basketball star and excelled in everything he attempted. His high school graduation was almost embarrassing because he had walked with almost every academic and athletic award.

Not only that: he was the most generous and unassuming student in the school. In his spare time, he tutored younger, mentally challenged students. He was consistently at the top of his class at college. Nobody was surprised - that was just Ray! It was expected; he simply was outstanding.

That's why his parents couldn't believe it when the hospital phoned: Ray had slit his wrists on a basketball court and was found unconscious after bleeding for fifteen minutes.

When they arrived at the hospital, they were shocked to find a young man full of anger and fear. They could hardly believe it was their son. Ray had lashed out at the doctors and medical staff who tried to help him and it was only after days of gentle questioning that he finally was able to share the truth with his bewildered parents:

Ray believed that he was only worthwhile because he was a "success:" because he pleased his parents by excelling; because his college profited by his skill at basketball; because his friends could always rely on him for anything.

But all the while inside - he felt hollow. He was convinced he would wind-up alone - if he couldn't keep up his performance... people would see right through him. The only value he placed on himself was external achievement - but he didn't want to be only a performer. His whole life had been a "role" and he believed that was all he was worth. He felt he never could accept himself without achievements to define him.

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My sisters and brothers, this story reveals rather dramatically that we as humans have two sides - two selves - within us.

There is what Thomas Merton calls the “false-self” or the superficial, “external-self,” the self that I think I “should” be, the self I present to the world. The self the world tells me I must be if I’m going to be happy, ... if I’m going to “make it.”

The external self was in charge of young Ray’s life - and can be running our lives, too. As one powerful example, consider the successful businessman, who identifies himself solely with his glittering career that he spent all his life obtaining: he introduces himself as the CEO of a Fortune 500 Company, but feels utterly lost after retirement and falls apart when the crutch of the false-self is no longer there to fall upon. The external-self can be all about obtaining things to make one happy. The more I have - the happier I’ll be; ...the more I do - the better am!

But in reality, the fake (false) self - the superficial-self - is not a happy-self because it’s continuously under threat. At any moment we could lose our wealth, our career, our admirers. There are competitors all around us - ready to reach in and take our place. The false-self is a lonely-self. It is enveloped in masks and facades and puts on, as T.S. Eliot said: “A face to meet the faces I meet;” keeping others at a distance for fear they will discover how insecure and needy I really am.

You know, it’s wonderful and amazing to see the tremendous performance of the young athletes at the Olympics in London..., but, it’s sort of scary to imagine what might be happening inside them, when they win *and* when they lose. Are they in touch enough with themselves to handle the tremendous pressure and expectations of others?

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Thomas Merton and other spiritual giants, contrast this “false-self” with the “true-self” - the interior-self, the real-self: who I really am: ... the frightened little voice in young Ray, the college student, calling out for help, for reassurance, for love. As frightening as Ray’s crisis was, within it was the potential for him to be reborn, to get on track to be the person that *God created him to be.*

Not in any way rejecting the wonderful intelligence and many gifts and talents that God gave him, but realizing that in and of themselves, they will never give him the peace and serenity and fulfillment he is seeking. By connecting with the true-self, his soul - his heart - his being, Ray will realize that his identity is no longer built solely on the expectations of others, but built on the experience in his heart that he is loved - by God, by his parents and significant others - simply for who he *is*. By connecting with his true-self, Ray will feel cherished because of a beauty that is more than 'skin-deep.'

When you embrace your true-self, you let God live in you and then you are attuned to the music of the Universe!

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My brothers and sisters, putting away the old-self - as St Paul puts it in our 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: 'being renewed in Spirit by putting on the new-self created in God's image in righteousness and truth' - is a *life-long* journey. As Jesus puts it in today's Gospel: to work not for food that perishes, but for food that endures for eternal life, is a day to day journey.

When all is said and done, the purpose of religion, the purpose of the Church and the purpose of our Parish is to create a community where our true-selves can grow and flourish, and to create opportunities and an environment where we can reach out - locally and globally - to enable others too, to become the persons God created them to be.

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My sisters and brothers, during these remaining summer days, I invite all of us to take some time to reflect on this crucial spiritual question:

by-and-large, in my day-to-day life, am I operating - functioning - living and breathing, out of my "true-self:" the self created in God's image and likeness...

or,

by-and-large, am I operating - functioning - living out of the "false-self:" the superficial-self that is always hungry, always thirsty, always searching for more, yet remaining empty, afraid, lonely and threatened...?

For the Christian: Jesus is the Way - the Truth, the Life; Jesus is the way to the Heart!

*“Jesus said to the Crowd: ‘I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never hunger; whoever comes to me will never thirst.’”*

Amen!