

IN DEPTH BIBLE STUDY: SPIRITUALITY OF THE CROSS

CLASS 19 and POWER POINT 19:

VOCATION: THE SPIRITUALITY OF ORDINARY LIFE

The MASKS of GOD:

1. God baptizes through the hands of pastors. Christ presides over His supper, the pastor distributes the bread and wine. It is God's Word that rings out during the sermon. Pastors wear robes and vestments and collars to symbolize that his human being is no different from his parishioners, but is clothed in an office, in which He must act in the stead and command of God.
2. Laypeople also serve the church. They use their abilities, talents and their vocations for the good of the community of faith. Administering the property, serving on boards, and the like are necessary for any institution. Laypeople can proclaim the good news of Christ's forgiveness, primarily operating in their own vocation. Parents evangelize their children. At work, relationships are formed with colleagues, who in the course of friendship and common work, can be introduced to the Gospel. God's Word extends into the world through vocation.
3. Lay people and their pastors must remember that they do not have to be doing "church work," in order to be serving God. It's easy to spend every night at church at a meeting doing God' work!" But spending time with spouse and family and fulfilling the demands of your job are ways to work for God, or rather God working through you.
4. The vocation of Pastor is to be "minister," that is a servant of God's Word. He serves us by feeding us God's Word and Sacrament, proclaiming God's Law and Gospel and forgiveness in Christ. We depend on our pastors through whom Christ is conveyed to us. The term "Pastor" is simply a term for "shepherd," a humble vocation from God's earthly Kingdom. The Pastor takes care of God's sheep and in that calling as in all callings, God is hidden.

BEARING THE CROSS IN VOCATION:

5. For all the spiritual significance in everyday life posited by the doctrine of vocation-How God is active and present in our relationships-it is evident that we often fail, suffer, and experience frustrations in our vocation. Parents might have done all things right in raising children, and yet have anguish of having a child turn against them. A business owner's company may go bankrupt throwing all out of work. A pastor's congregation may turn against him. Problems arise in marriage. Often or occasionally vocations turn into a burden, a cross to bear. The Theology of the cross applies in particular to vocation.
6. Since God is at work in vocation as Wingren notes, the devil seeks to thwart vocation. One way to turn away from sacrificial love of neighbor is a "theology of glory," that is to self-aggrandizement, pride in works and achievements of vacuous spiritual success. "Wanting to be exalted instead of serving," says Wingren, regarding office as a possibility for selfish power instead of for service, is offense against vocation."

7. Another ploy of Satan is to pry the person out of their calling. "Temptation in vocation," says Wingren, "is the devil's attempt to get a person out of their vocation." Thus, a temptation to quit: get a divorce, to leave one's children, to quit the job, to give up writing or music or whatever talents one has.
8. Bearing the cross often involves the sense that what one does in vocation is futile/worthless. "When the cross of any vocation is borne," says Wingren, "that vocation appears lowly." Ironically, this sensation is experienced even in the vocations that would appear to have the most power and prestige. Presidents and millionaires are often tormented by their responsibilities and by their self-perceived inability to meet them. "Viewed from without," says Wingren, "some offices seem to be surrounded by a pleasing Luster. But seen from within, it is evident that those offices demand sacrificial, downward-reaching service, which is a cross for the old-man."
9. There are normal hardships that characterize any vocation. These frustrations/sufferings can become taken into the cross of Christ, at precisely the point in which we realize our weakness/dependence in Christ. The sense of lowliness is resisted out of pride or can become humility. Our inability to succeed in our own work can bring us to a deeper faith in God behind the mask.
10. Trials in vocation, drive us to prayer. "He who labors knows that there are times when all human ways are
- 11.
12. ," observes Wingren. "In a special case this is the time for prayer." When we can handle our own prayers through our own ingenuity and effort, there is little need to appeal to God. But when we are at wits' end, when nothing is working, when the situation is desperate, we then turn to God. The most intense, passionate prayer is when we are struggling. "For what sort of prayer would it be if need were not present and pressing upon us," says Luther, "That the prayer be stronger." "Prayer like this," comments Wingren, "potent and transforming, can hardly be made by anyone who is not in deep need and desperation."
13. Prayer like this is answered. "Desperation arises in our vocation & stimulates prayer. But God's answer to prayer also comes in our vocations; & the divine intervention which answer prayer is closely related to....the transformation of the work of our vocation." Prayer, from our perspective, brings God into our vocation. We commit what we do to God, surrendering to His will & trusting His providence. To cite another great quotation from Wingren, "Prayer is the door through which God, Creator and Lord, enters creatively into home, community and labor."
14. Prayer brings faith into the vocation. The dependence realized in prayer is an example of faith. Without faith, vocations are mere employments, mere things to do, empty of God & empty of meaning, faith sees them as masks of God. W/o faith, suffering is empty and meaningless of life. With faith, suffering in vocation becomes a cross, comprehended in the saving cross of Christ. Wingren concludes;