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One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one. Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, “I’m saving these starfish, Sir”. The old man chuckled aloud, “Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?” The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, “I made a difference to that one!”

~adapted from The Star Thrower, by Loren Eiseley (1907-1977)

I love this parable! It is such a great way to recognize our repercussions on the world. Be they large or small, every action we make has an effect on others and the world around us. Another point to be made is that the boy was not doing this because he was told to do so; he did it because it was the right thing to do. Famed UCLA Basketball Coach John Wooden is credited with saying, “The true test of a man’s character is what he does when no one is watching.” I really do try to live by this. The way it has morphed in my mind is that I am constantly living with a camera over my shoulder. I know there isn’t one really there, but I tend to think as if there was. That way when I see a piece of trash along my path or a grocery cart that needs to be returned to the store, I feel compelled to do the right thing, to pick up the litter, to return the cart. Likewise, I imagine that my interactions are also being viewed by someone else through some invisible lens. It can sometimes temper what I say or how I respond. Sometimes.

But that is how life is. Every action, thought (spoken or unspoken), or intention is seen by God. Psalm 139 speaks of how well God knows us- even better than we know ourselves! God has created us with free will. We can do (or not do) whatever we want. But that doesn’t mean we have free range to do anything. We must live with the consequences of our decisions. If we decide to spend our money wisely and pay our bills, we can have electricity in our home. If we decide we’d rather buy concert tickets than pay the light bill, we have to live in darkness for a time. But God has not just abandoned us to the world. He doesn’t expect us to innately know right from wrong. He has given us guidelines by which to live. Most importantly, and really a summary of the Ten Commandments, are the Two Great Commandments: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). The first Great Commandment addresses the first three of the 10 Commandments. The second Great Commandment summarizes Commandments four through ten. But these commandments are not rules to limit our world. Rather, they are the parameters within which we have all this freedom. We can decide if we’d like to attend only Sunday Mass or if we want to be present each day. We can decide whether or not to participate in Eucharistic Adoration, praying the rosary, or participating in the Stations of the Cross. We choose the words we use when we talk. They can be words that glorify God or they can be ones that blaspheme Him. We can take care of our neighbors by financially supporting various efforts initiated by the parish or diocese (or any number of other programs), by participating in service projects that allow us to use our God-given gifts to honor Him by helping others, or by doing what’s best for our families by being present, responsible, and living as a good example to our children. Or we can turn our eyes to the suffering of others.

We have been told the expectations. It is our choice what we do with that information. I pray that I am doing my best. I pray that you are, too.

Join us in Fellowship Hall each week after the last Mass for Faith Formation. There is so much richness in our faith. No one could ever know it all. Come grow with us!

Blessings,

Julie Gould

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