

Aging Gracefully - An Invitation to Contemplation

This week, for your consideration, is a summary of the discussion on meaning, from Sr. Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years – Growing Older Gracefully*. Following the summary are quotations on the burden and blessing of meaning, a personal reflection, and a call to contemplate meaning in view of your own life, no matter where you happen to be on the journey.

Meaning

Our world is so busy that "Time and space, time and thought have very little currency now," Sr. Joan writes. Although written in 2008, that statement still holds true today. If anything, things are faster, busier, more intense. News is available twenty-four hours a day, updated and refreshed for our constant consumption. Now, more than ever, the world needs people who can slow down long enough to focus on meaning and reflect on the value of what is happening, not just the speed with which it happens. Invariably, when we introduce ourselves to others, after saying our name, the next question is about our livelihood, about what we do for a living. No one asks, what you stand for, what you believe or what matters to you. We focus only on work as the be-all and end-all of everything that matters. Ultimately, when work is over, who we are is a question with which many people struggle, and the answer depends on how well we are able to answer that question. Finally, and most importantly, openness to the working of the Holy Spirit is key in finding meaning. Offering ourselves in service of others is what God wants, what Jesus taught us.

Burden and Blessing

"The burden of these years is that we might allow ourselves to believe that not being as fast or as busy as we used to be is some kind of human deficiency."

"The blessing of these years is that we can come to understand that it is the quality of what we think and say that makes us valuable members of society, not how fast or busy we are."

Personal Reflection

"Big data," "artificial intelligence," "multi-tasking," "band-width," and "leverage" are just a few of the terms that come to mind as I contrast "doing" and "meaning." How is meaning found in the mere act of quantification, reporting, and leveraging of data, unless the interpretation of that data serves to improve the quality of life for those who feel the impact of policy changes based on such data? Don't even get me started with multi-tasking! It is an illusion to think that multi-tasking is something that is even possible. It is a myth, and often, work performed while "multi-tasking" is work that needs correction at a later date. Our brains simply don't allow us to attend to two activities simultaneously, especially tasks requiring high-level brain functioning. What we are actually doing when we think we are multi-tasking is simply switching between two tasks.

How do we slow down enough to find meaning? Intentionality comes to mind; we set aside time for reflection and prayer, and we ask God for the grace to listen to the calling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We pause long enough for discernment, attend a retreat, read the Bible or talk to someone we desire to emulate. With patience and hope, we discover a way to use our unique voices to inspire, encourage, and deepen relationships in our lives and the life of our community, long after our careers are over.

Invitation to Personal Reflection and Contemplation

What gives meaning to your life?

What matters to you?

Are you able to commit to one small practice to deepen your spirituality?

How are you called to use your gifts for others?

How can you share the wisdom of your experience for the benefit of others?

Warm regards,

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