

Your True Companion

Try living a reflective life. If you feel stuck, there's someone who could help you...

by DEACON JIM MCFADDEN

Embarking on a spiritual journey is often too challenging to do alone. We need companions who can assist us along the way. It's important to consider whom we spiritually 'hang out with' and to whom we apprentice ourselves. If we lack the vision to see reality as Christ does, we need to seek out someone who can guide us with their open eyes. If we're spiritually squinting and

not allowing life to come to us in an unfettered way, we must find someone who strives to gaze upon the world just as the beloved disciple did when he lay his head on Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. John 13:23). But if we apprentice ourselves to someone who is as blind or blurred as we are, we may have a soulmate, but of a negative kind. We will have a companion sharing in our darkness, and together we will fall into the same rabbit hole. It's the veritable 'blind leading the blind' scenario, which is why we need spiritual companions with a high degree of humble self-awareness, who are grounded in their relationship with God, and who strive for wisdom. If our companion lacks these qualities, we risk stunting our spiritual growth.

Follow the Path

The question arises: Who is our teacher? Who is our companion? Do we get our guidance from cable news, shock radio, podcasts, and the internet with their penchant for conspiracy theories bereft of epistemic confirmation,



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or does a different source form us? Jesus offers Himself as an example of a spiritual companion and teacher to follow: "A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher." (Luke 6:40) It is a call to follow His example and teachings, which is important for companionship with those who are intentionally striving to follow the Way of Jesus.

Such companions undertake the hard work of transforming their interior dysfunction as they surrender to the Lord. The alternative is to project our pain upon others. Our Lord Jesus challenges us to be neither deflective, self-referential, presumptuous nor hypocritical when He says: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41) Why is it that we can see and expound on the slightest faults of others while being oblivious to our staggering imperfections? One partial explanation for this syndrome is that by living an unreflective life, our attention is always focused outward on others.

Rather than exploring the interior and confronting our darkness and shadow, we have honed our focus on others to avoid looking at ourselves. That's why we don't miss the tiniest of their moral flaws. However, we do not see ourselves clearly without being trained in self-observation.

This syndrome blocks the flow of grace into our heart and soul. We do not see clearly, we're not 'pure of heart,' seeing reality objectively. Instead, our minds have biases, tapes, and storylines that enter into everything we say and do. If we are unaware of these 'implied biases,' we suffer from invincible ignorance. Without this self-knowledge, we tend to paint perfect images of ourselves, or even more dangerously, innocent pictures of ourselves, not in real need of genuine repentance. Occupying this elevated perch, we look at others with disdain rather than compassion. As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the only way we can effectively evangelize the Good News is to tell our story of massive conversion humbly.

A Sweet Parable

A story about Mahatma Gandhi illustrates this point. A woman brought her granddaughter to Gandhi and commanded: "My granddaughter eats too much sugar. Tell her to stop."

Gandhi said: "Bring her back next week." The grandmother and granddaughter returned next week, but Gandhi again put them off, saying the same thing: "Bring them back to me next week." This happened three times.

Finally, Gandhi said to the woman's granddaughter: "You should not eat sugar. It is not good for you." The grandmother was nonplussed. "We waited four weeks for this simple remark." "Ah," Gandhi sighed. "It took me that long to stop eating too much sugar myself."

The only way to help our neighbor is to tell the story of our own struggle. That is the kind of spiritual companionship we need as we follow the Way of Jesus.



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