

Psyche & Soul 24

SPIRITUALITY OF SIMPLICITY – “DOWNWARD MOBILITY”

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD

sumedhacentre@gmail.com

podcast link:

<https://anchor.fm/boscom/episodes/2-24-PSYCHE--SOUL--55-enlka5>

Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

Last weekend we reflected on a Holistic Spirituality – Wholeness, not Flawlessness.

This weekend we shall reflect on another important aspect of spirituality – Simplicity, so essential in a consumerist culture.

Lessons from Covid-19

One of the positive blessings emerging from the Covid-19 and the lockdown that forced us to be home bound, is that we would have recognized we need so little to live a happy and satisfying life. If we have the basic necessities of food, clothes and shelter, we do not need much else. The word basic here is important because food can be extravagant, clothes superfluous and shelter luxurious.

We would have recognized that much of what we considered essential are not so. We are able to manage with so little. We would have recognized that so much of what we possess is totally unneeded, that so much of what we fill our daily schedule with are totally unnecessary or trivial. We recognised what are essential, such as our relationships, and learned to devote time to them and eliminate unnecessary activities and superficial interests. This has truly been my experience that is transforming the way I live.

My Experience and Learning

Covid forced me to be more self-reliant and simplify my life. Covid-restrictions prevented our housemaid being available for a long time. This turned out to be a real blessing – a transformative experience. I realized I could do much of what she used to do.

I cleaned my room. Washed my own clothes. I realized I needed just two sets of clothes. I would wear one set one day, and wash the other, by hand (no machines), and just use them in turn. It did not inconvenience me in any way- a few extra minutes, that's all. I had always wondered how the Sisters of Mother Teresa manage with just one set, or maximum two, of clothes. It is possible, without much inconvenience. It actually made their life simple, unburdened by needless possessions. They could be transferred from one community to another at a moment's notice (as it often happened!). All their possession could be put into a small side bag, and walk out to the next community.

That's when I realized that I have so many clothes that I seldom use. They remain in my cupboard, used occasionally or never. Why not get rid of them? I will.

Simplifying Our Lives

So many of us have not only clothes, but many other things that we possess but do not use, or very seldom use. We could easily give them away, to those who really need them, and simply our lives and enrich theirs. We could keep aside two or three sets of fine clothes for special occasions. For the rest, just have the minimum that is essential. And why not we ourselves wash our clothes and dishes, clean our own rooms? You know, it is simple, and one advantage is that it provides quite a bit of exercise, and invigorates us.

We need not to throw away our clothes the moment a tear appears, or has faded and rush to buy new ones. Prince Charles, who can afford anything he wants, uses the same suits again and again, even mended ones, even at official gatherings. He does not feel a need to impress anyone with what he wears. Instead, he has inspired others to live simply, and save the money for charities.

He also advocates simplicity and challenges the consumerist culture. In an interview with the Editor of British *Vogue* magazine he said: We have “huge opportunities” to challenge “this extraordinary trend of throw-away clothing or throw-away everything, frankly.” He added that he himself prefers to get shoes “or any item of clothing” repaired when worn out or faulty rather than discarding them. He was taught simple living from childhood. When he was a child, he and his sibling used to take their shoes down to the cobbler in Scotland where he lived then and would watch with fascination as the cobbler repaired them.

Saving the Planet

Researchers at John Hopkins University have predicted that every two.-three years we are going to have a pandemic more virulent and destructive than Corona. And the cause climate change, resulting from over exploitation of earth’s resources and polluting the atmosphere. Currently we are using 1.5 time the earth’s resources destroying its capacity for self-renewal.

Often we accuse the multi-national corporations and developed countries of contributing to climate change and over utilization of earth’s resources that cause it. But we forget we too make our contribution through our own over-consumption.

Spirituality of “Downward Mobility”

This is where the Spirituality of Simplicity comes in. Several years ago, seeing consumerism spreading over the globe, destroying natural resources, as well as exploiting the poor workers Father Pedro Arrupe, former Jesuit General and a spiritual giant of recent times, proposed a spirituality of “*Downward Mobility*” which is a radical move downward in the scale of material standards, trying to live with less and less rather trying to acquire more and more. But we love upward mobility. We want the latest gadgets, possess the latest fashion accessory, even though they are totally unnecessary. We often buy things, especially clothes, which we may never use! For some of us hoarding things, which we may never use, has become a hobby. Every time we buy something unnecessary we are depleting nature’s resources hastening the next pandemic.

As Pedro Arrupe observed, “The superfluous becomes the convenient; the convenient becomes the necessary; the necessary becomes indispensable.” (By Downward Mobility Arrupe also meant

solidarity with the poor, the exploited and the powerless who are the most affected by climate change and globalization.)

In a consumer culture where we are constantly told to buy the latest, it is a challenge to practise downward mobility. We get so easily seduced to buy, also because we want keep up with the Joneses and flaunt our latest acquisition to impress our friends and neighbours. We need to resist the seduction by the consumer industry through its incessant advertising campaigns that lures us to buy the latest, which almost always is totally unnecessary.

There is also so much we waste. Water, electricity, food. If we men could use a mug of water when we shave, rather than let the water keep on running, for example, we could save much water. We could also make sure our plumbing is good and there are no leaking taps. We could reduce the consumption of electricity, switching of unnecessary lights and reducing the use of electric gadgets. When eating out, we could order only the food that we are confident we can consume, rather than leave behind to be thrown away. There are so many simple ways of conserving energy. What is needed is only goodwill and some effort.

For our Introspection

How can we simplify our life?

How can we avoid waste and conserve energy?

How can we practice downward mobility?

For Our Prayer

In his 1st letter to Timothy, St Paul says: “If we have food and clothing , with these we shall be content.”

In the gospels Jesus exhorts us (Mathew 6, 26 -34; Luke 23, 22-31) to trust our God who provides us with everything and not be anxious about the future. We don't need to hoard.

We could recall the lives of those who have lived very simple lives, such as St. Francis Assisi, St. Claire, Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi practiced downward mobility in solidarity with the poor who lacked basic necessities of life), etc. We could then take a relaxed and comfortable posture and feel the presence of the God who is with us here and now. Talk to God about whatever is triggered in us by the Spirituality of Simplicity and Downward Mobility and also listen to what God has to say to us.

We could also read Mathew 6, 26-34, or Luke 23, 22-31, and stay with what these words of Jesus evoke in us

Have a pleasant weekend. Be safe. Be well. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening.

Jose Parappully SDB, PhD
sumedhacentre@gmail.com