

### ON TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Grace and Peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to talk about taking care of myself; that is not exactly true. I think I know a great deal about the subject but I still have the problem of believing that it is very difficult to talk about.

For a long time I have believed it is necessary to have crutches--not psychological crutches, but spiritual crutches--in order to make it. And yet, every person must tailor his own, and, indeed, build his own, crutches. This is what makes the subject difficult to talk about. Nonetheless, certain general things can be said.

I want to read something: "Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your own law, I the Lord God say you are God's'? Those are called God's to whom the word of God was delivered and the scripture cannot be set aside. Why then do you charge me with blasphemy because I, consecrated, and sent into the world by my Father, said, 'I am God's own son.'" That was the 10th Chapter of John.

For the time being, and a little while longer, no one can take care of me. I have to take care of myself. I would not want to be pressed too hard to substantiate that statement but that is the way I sense it. And I further sense, that while no one can take care of you, you must take care of yourself. For if you do not, you will not be taken care of and then you will be in trouble. I worry more about this than I ever have before because we have become so sophisticated in the realm of the spirit that we are at the point of no return. It is much closer to the surface with us than it was when we were in swaddling clothes. What frightens me most is, particularly with us, it happens so quickly. It's all over. You are gone before you even know what hit you. This is not true for those in swaddling clothes.

Thinking on this subject reminded me of something one of our colleagues said in a speech the other day. He spoke of throwing a stone up into the air and then, before the stone decides to come plummeting back to earth, there seems to be a pause. In my mind, that is an art. The stone does not go straight up and then straight down, like in a vacuum. First, there is a pause.

I came upon that realization in 1971 when we first did the Social Process Triangles. We spoke of contradictions within the establishment and protestations against those contradictions and then some of those protests began to

weave themselves together to form a trend. That, we said, was how social revolution takes place. Then a series, a body, a collection of those trends, spinning off from the establishment, wind themselves together to form a space platform, or a position from which they can turn about and re-enter the establishment, occasioning a radical revolution.

It is like that with us. We shot off into space and then we made the turn. I was reminded today that most of us were created in the 1950's. We were the revolutionaries before the revolution in the 1960's. Even those who were very young in the 1950's were created then. And now we are gone, so to speak. There are no more of us, or, by this time, they would have shown up. Maybe they have changed their face. I believe this is a tribute to the Church. The Church created within it the revolutionaries before society belched forth her revolutionaries. Critical as we might be of the Church, I think that is precisely what happened. It is as if we made the turn first.

The image of a rock being thrown into the air and pausing may not be scientifically accurate, but, to my mind, it speaks to our present situation. The rock pauses before it decides to pick up momentum and begin its fall. We have made the turn--very successfully, I might add. And it has not been at all easy in the last two years. We have lost some. But as a whole, we are pretty fit. We are scarred in ways we were not two years ago, and we're a lot older, but as a whole, we're pretty fit.

Now we are at the moment of pause. We have developed unbelievable skills in the last twenty years in the process of getting off the ground, of getting loose from that which was yesteryear. We are unbelievably disciplined. And in this process, we have developed a corporateness which allowed us to care for and sustain one another in an unbelievable way. That is why we got around the bend in such good condition. We have built disciplinary structures to get us into the establishment--and we have to develop another kind of discipline. This time it must have the quality of a parachute. It has to drag along behind us. I wish I knew what it looked like, but I don't.

The discipline we have already internalized is not quite adequate. Of course, I am always speaking of corporate discipline when I use the word, but what we have is not quite adequate for where we are. We are going to develop disciplines; and, for the moment, I do not mean external structures. We have to readjust, as if we were recovering from "jet lag." I have been out of time for three days because I went to Los Angeles and back in one night. This may be crude, but it is like when you travel to a different culture and, if you are not careful, your bowels get upset. People who are accustomed to that culture can drink the water and nothing phases them. But not you, not until you adjust.

Well, we are in the midst of a new hunk of bacteria, so to speak, and we are not yet adjusted. No one in this room is strong enough not to take seriously what I am trying to say. On the other hand, I think we will find, in say eighteen months, if we are still standing, that corporateness will care for us

and sustain us in ways we never dreamed of in the past. But, in the meanwhile, we had better take care of ourselves.

There is another way I could have introduced this subject: You and I dread, in an unbelievable way, the experience of the self-conscious Dark Night and the self-conscious Long March. If we went out of existence today, and were remembered for only one thing, it would be for plotting the Netherworld, the Nether-land. We did that well. And now, the excruciating pain of being our understanding of the Dark Night and the Long March is within us. What we have is, in no way, whatsoever, an intellectual understanding of it. It is as if we now have robbed ourselves in it. This is the most solitary of the solitaires. There is no help for anyone in this area. No one can help.

Now, how do you take care of yourself? I do not really know. But my mind goes back to an art professor I knew at the University of Texas. He was the first person to get through my skull that there was such a thing as experiencing your experience. Actually, experiencing your experience is the beginning of profound consciousness. What time is it now - 2:00? Think of the innumerable happenings, or hunks of life, that have come to you since this day began. How many of them have slipped by and are gone forever because we did not stand at attention before them? That is experiencing your experience, or consciousness about consciousness. To begin to take care of yourself is to take seriously the experiencing of your experiences; that is, taking seriously the fact that you have only one life, and, by God, every second of it is a whole life. It has nothing to do with the relativity within that life-- the good and evil or pleasant and unpleasant situations. It's your life. You stand present to every bit of it. You eat and chew it.

For me, this requires certain oddities. Now this has nothing to do with you, but in my case, I have decided not to tolerate anyone waking me up in the morning. I have, before Being and God and my own existence, decided that I shall take care of getting up every morning. I don't always make it, and it burns me up when I don't make it. And I even appreciate it, on those days, for someone to come by and tell me that Christ is risen all over again and that I have not beaten the Lord up. But I intend those days to be rare. So I get up 30 minutes before I have to get up. That is, I can get myself in barely decent condition to meet my fellow human beings in 15 minutes. So I get up 45 minutes before I have to leave. Why? I want to get myself spiritually dressed. And on those days when I haven't gotten myself spiritually dressed, it is quite apparent. I am talking about taking care of myself. For me, taking care of myself is getting myself ready to stand at attention before everything that happens. Why, I would not permit anyone to pass me in the morning without my saying "Hi" to them. Why? Not because someone is walking by me but because that walking by me is my life.

I am a terrible speaker. Anyone who dies as thoroughly as I do before he gets up to make a speech has got to be a terrible speaker. I almost always finish a talk and go waddling off with my tail between my legs, feeling as if I have been a great failure. That is psychological and I have ways to handle that. However, most of the time, I finish a talk filled with a despair

of the spirit. When that happens, I know I better immediately take care of it. Ordinarily, I try to find colleagues to help me. But I am doing the helping, not them. I begin to talk with them a bit.

Last Monday I felt terrible after I gave a talk, thinking I had done an outlandish job. I almost crawled down to my cubicle. Then people began to come around and I began taking care of myself. A young squirt--one of my younger colleagues--came in and he thought I was out for comfort. He thought I wanted someone to say something nice. I did, and I can't deny that because part of the psychological is always going to be there. But I was after more than that. I was trying to get a hold of what I was despairing over.

If you don't get ahold of what you are despairing over, then, loose down inside of you, it will begin to eat away at you.

What we need is feedback over and beyond the psychological dimension. If I say to you, "By golly, you look good." Never stop there. Have me say what or how you are looking nice, right now.

One of us gave a fine speech the other night and I could see by looking at him that he knew he had done a good job. Still, I wanted to tell him. So I sent spies out to locate him and they found him up in his room all by himself. I don't really know what he was doing, but I believe he was after dealing with his situation. Whether he had a glowing, or a sorrow-filled response, he was in his room taking care of himself. He was doing what we sometimes call unwinding. But if unwinding is the only thing you are doing, then it is not enough.

Those of you who have studied the charting method know that one of its crucial principles is to keep one eye on the paragraph and one eye on your gizzard. When you look at your gizzard, you are after getting ahold of your feelings. If your response to a paragraph is "Garbage!". Then throw the book away. Or, if you find yourself going "Boy-oh! Tremendous!" Stop immediately and ask yourself why your heart is going pitter-patter. This is a matter of standing at attention to your own existence.

God did not give you emotions because they tingle you. I don't think God is much interested in tingling. He gave you emotions so you could experience your experience. If I feel terrible, if I feel like a failure, my job as a person, as a self, is to find out why I feel this way.

After I gave that outlandish talk, I got clear on why I thought it was so bad and so I stole away for two hours and rewrote it. And if I gave that talk again this morning, you would really think it was something. If you have a fuss with your husband or your wife. That's a great thing, I suppose. But you want to find out why it happened. And I don't mean why it happened in the psychological sense. To rationalize that "Pappa didn't like him when he was a boy so I have to expect this kind of guff from him" won't help. Because you are not interested in him, you are interested in yourself.

For instance, if you make me angry, it has nothing to do with you. It has to do with me. And if you delight me, that has nothing to do with you. It's my delight. Perhaps I wouldn't have had the delight were it not for you, but, once I have got that delight, it's mine. I have to appropriate it. I have to eat it. I have to grasp it.

And my spiritual ablutions in the morning serve no other purpose than to get me on tiptoe so that when I turn the corner coming down the stairs on the first landing, the people on security will see a human being coming down the stairs. And when the Student House folks see me, early in the morning, even though I may not feel very "chipper," they encounter someone strutting like a drum major.

One of our Korean colleagues cornered me in a hotel in Korea because he just had to talk. But I didn't have time to talk with him; I have got no time to listen to people spill out their spiritual "junk." That is not the way to help people. Anyway, he trapped me and out came all his spiritual junk. After he had said three sentences, he really didn't need to say anymore. But because I was a Westerner and he was, in a way, my host, I sat there and listened, even though I knew exactly what he was going to say--down to the last word. He was spelling out the Dark Night of the Soul to the last jot and tittle, interpreting it as something quite, quite different.

Two days ago, a young lady cornered me and--much as I try to avoid these people, she wouldn't be avoided. She showed up in my cubicle at 5 a.m. She said about three sentences, but this time, because she was in my house, I interrupted her. I picked up on the three sentences she had said and then just spelled out the whole thing to her. Well, her eyes were popping out. She kept thinking, "How did that old man know all this about me?"

The Dark Night of the Soul. You may think I'm naive, but for the first time I understood how the Starets have their power of seeing through something. They may not use these words to express it, but they understand that every so-called problem anyone ever had--when you peel down its artichoke leaves--is simply the experience of humanness itself--nothing other than the Dark Night of the Soul and the Long March of Care. That is what consciousness is.

I have decided that I am going to pull everything that happens to me through the Dark Night. I remember someone sitting me down in a chair a few years ago and slapping me around until I finally realized that every situation literally is a container of spiritual meaning. If the word "spiritual" is too religious for you, then try transparent meaning, or the meaning of pure consciousness itself.

How do you take care of yourself? What if a beloved one dies? I have two choices: either I can respond temporally or I can respond transparently, period. If one of you doesn't like me, I can respond to that spiritually or I can respond temporally by turning to him and trying to reform him or change myself so that he will like me. Something became very clear to me in the

last few weeks. In Joseph Cambell's book on schizophrenia and the spirit, he says that when you enter the Other World, either you learn to swim or become a schizo. No doubt this is true. However, it has occurred to me that even if you can swim, you become a schizo. The only difference is, if you have learned to swim, you're in charge of being a schizo rather than letting it take charge of you.

I always say to myself that I lead a double life. I have this life that has relationships to various human beings; and it is a very, very particular life. But I have another life, the one I look through to the transparent meaning of life. It is a different world entirely. And it isn't hard to see how one can be tempted to float off into that world--and you can't even see it. You never finally succeed unless you die as a self, to be sure, because the Other World only exists in this World--but its another world. And its not particular; it's universal.

And that statement is not an abstract Platonism. It is an empirical statement in the sense that what does not change is the Dark Night of the Soul. In the Other World, I do not have to wait around for humiliation, weakness, resentment or suffering. I do not have to wait around for dislocation, burned-outness, ineffectivity or unfulfillment. They are all there. If I was at all adequate in articulating this, you would hear what you heard your father's father's father say: You can't touch him. Not even the death of a beloved one can destroy you.

There are times when I would like to be 6-foot-7. I like tall women and tall men because by standing tall, you have the secret of the Dark Night and the Long March. If one becomes his weakness and becomes his humiliation and becomes his dislocation, how could any weakness get to him? I am talking about a man who has become his own man. One who is taking care of himself. Wouldn't it be funny if the next time your spouse beat you up that you interpreted that fight in its transparentization rather than through the obvious fact that he is a louse? I'm talking about taking care of yourself.

The next thing I want to point to has to do with meditation. Picture the Religious Mode Triangles. If you think of one side coming in at an angle (that you are facing) you have engagement, the intensification of deed and prayer. That is action in the world. When you come in on the angle on the other side, you have detachment, the intensified word, and meditation. These three things have to do with taking care of yourself so that you can do the other angle--engage yourself unlimitedly. If you don't learn to be a detached human being, you are lost. You must clearly participate in each situation without losing your soul to any situation. This is done by exercises in meditation.

What is meditation? I call it grounding myself in history. I take extremely seriously what I relate myself to in history. I feel that if I would go for one second without knowing myself in relationship to history then I would disappear as in a puff of smoke. If I lost for one moment a functional image of myself--and that's not easy--I'd be lost. This also

has to do with the interior council. You don't have Amos on the council because he was a nice guy or Luther because he was fat. You use your council to ground yourself, to give yourself a place to stand that will enable you to detach yourself. If I didn't grasp that I was marching with the League, with the community of saints, I could not endure the profundity of consciousness I have. I would have no choice but suicide.

It's as if you have to learn to read the Scriptures without reading them.

This is meditation and without it, you have no place to stand for the detachment that is necessary to stand at attention to your life in every situation.

My last point has to do with describing what in one sense is nothing but trusting Being. Trusting God. It is very clear to me that we have no choice whatsoever about God's sovereignty over our lives. No matter who you are, or what you believe, we are all under his sovereign rule. It's always true that "if today you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind", for the sovereignty of God never changes. But you decide about God's care for you; God will rule whether you ask him to or not. If you want Being to take care of you, then you decide you've got to ask for it. You have to give yourself into the hands of Being.

Lots of things have hurt me. One time someone said something to me that implied God didn't know what he was doing. A volcano exploded in me and it wasn't until sometime after that happened that I realized why I responded like I did. That statement flagrantly violated my understanding of what it meant to trust Being. Every situation--not all minus one--but every situation (for one who has asked Being to take care of him) every situation becomes Being taking care of you--even unto death itself.

And when you hear that song "God Will Take Care of You," remember that he'll not do it unless you ask. And that is done by standing on tiptoe--at every situation and in every life circumstance.

In the next few months, you have got to take care of yourself spiritually. And you only take care of yourself because you're needed to care for the world. There is no tragedy in all of those colleagues of ours who took their two bags and ran. The tragedy is that the world is in such dire need of those who universally care, even unto their own death.

--Joseph W. Matthews