

## Have I Been Saved?



They're right, and their insight is a needed challenge. We too easily and too frequently get the wrong focus apposite both Christian discipleship and human maturity.

The real question in our lives, at least during our adult years, shouldn't be: What must I do to go to heaven? Or, what must I do to avoid going to hell? Not that concerns about our own salvation are unimportant or that heaven and hell are unreal, the point is rather that our deepest motivation has to be to do things for others and not for ourselves. For the main part, our own salvation will take care of itself if we focus on the needs of others. Granted, both scripture and what's best in human wisdom do say that we may not be so overly-focused on helping others that we neglect our own needs, but both also make it clear, as does the Prayer of St. Francis, that taking care of ourselves is paradoxical and we that receive what we need for our own lives primarily by giving it away to others.

And so our primary concern shouldn't be with the questions: Am I saved? Or even with the question: "Have I found Jesus as my personal savior?" Again, this needs qualification: A personal and affective relationship to Jesus is not, for a Christian, any Christian, an unimportant or negotiable thing. Indeed in Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of John, a deep, affective, personal relationship to Jesus is the central component within Christian discipleship and is an end in itself. We don't, at the end of the day, develop a relationship to Jesus so that we have the energy and proper compass out of which to minister to others, though that is very much part of it. Rather we develop an intimate relationship with Jesus because that is an end in itself, the ultimate reason we become Christian.

In affirming that, the traditions of Evangelical Christians and of Roman Catholic devotional practice are correct. Nothing trumps a personal, affective relationship to Jesus and outside of that connection we aren't in fact real disciples of Christ. However Jesus, himself, mitigates any fundamentalism or one-sided devotional understanding of this by linking intimacy to him with the other half of the great commandment: Love God and love neighbor. Simply put, we show our love for God, our intimacy

with Jesus, by laying down our lives for our neighbor. Christian discipleship is never only about Jesus and me, even as it is always still about Jesus and me.

A priest friend of mine who teaches at a secular university was once asked by one of his students: "Father, have you met Jesus Christ?" His answer, no doubt, reflected some fatigue: "Yes," he replied, "I have met Jesus Christ, and it messed-up my whole life! There are days when I wish I hadn't met him!" What his answer, in its irreverence, correctly highlights is that meeting Jesus implies a lot more than a private, romantic, affective, and safe encounter with him and that meeting Jesus is more than having a private feeling in the soul that we are loved by and secure with God.

A non-negotiable part of meeting Jesus means being sent out, and not just alone on some private spiritual quest or individualized ministry. It means being called into community, into a church, and then sent out with others, "in pairs", to, as Nikos Kazantzakis poetically puts it, "walk in Christ's bloody footsteps", that is, to walk inside of mess and failure, misunderstanding and crucifixion, confusion and tiredness, darkness and God's seeming silence, wondering sometimes if you will indeed find a stone upon which to lay your head. Intimacy with Jesus mostly doesn't look like intimacy in a Hollywood film or like intimacy as defined in the manuals of privatized spirituality. It looks more like the intimacy that Jesus experienced with his Father as he walked resolutely towards Jerusalem, against the advice of his intimate circle, swallowing hard, knowing what awaited him there. The Jesuit volunteer corps summarize their discipleship in these words: "Ruined for life!" That wonderfully grasps both the intimacy and what it means.

Theresa of Avila suggests that we're mature in following Christ if our questions and concerns no longer have a self-focus: Am I saved? Have I met Jesus Christ? Do I love Jesus enough? These questions remain and remain valid; but they're not meant to be our main focus. Our real question needs to be: How can I be helpful?

Fritz Pearls simply puts it more graphically: How can I be spent? During our adult lives that trumps the question: Have I been saved?

Ron Rolheiser