

Theory 1b

HAPPINESS AND A RULE OF LIFE

Happiness as the starting point

What is the thing we all want? Happiness.

St. Augustine said, "We all want to live happily. In the whole human race, there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated."

We need to define happiness, but before we do, we must define the following:

What is *good* and what is *pleasure* or *delight*?

What is Happiness?

Happiness is to possess the good things that complete or fulfill our human nature.

To be happy and at peace we need a hierarchy of good things - actually, three levels of good things:

1. **The Divine Good** – Union with God, sharing in His Life by means of the sacraments, prayer and the practice of virtue.
2. **Profound Goods:**
 - a. Physical goods (food, shelter, health, safety, security, exercise, rest)
 - b. Psychological well-being
 - i. Order and stability
 - ii. Variety/Uncertainty, opportunity for change and growth
 - c. Friendship with family and friends
 - d. Knowledge – truth
 - e. Achievement / Meaningful Work / a way that we make the world a better place
 - f. Beauty – which is very different from entertainment
3. **Superficial or Instrumental goods** – These are just a means to an end and not an end in themselves

- a. Books are good, but only as a means to knowledge or beauty or achievement.
- b. Protein and carbs and fats as a means to nutrition...my main food groups are coffee and butter, oh yeah and bacon...
- c. Money, and a good reputation
- d. Again, the superficial goods are just a means to higher goods.

We need all of these, but we must keep them in order.

- Love the lesser things less; Love the greater things more; Virtue is rightly ordered love.

“Put first things first and we get the second things thrown in; put second things first and we lose both first and second things.” ~ C.S. Lewis

St Benedict created a really useful tool to get the good things we need to be happy. He called it a “Rule of Life.”

A Rule of Life is a schedule, a strategy, a recipe – whatever you want to call it, to live a well ordered and balanced life and be at peace.

1. Physical Needs
 - a. Sleep 6-8 hrs/day
 - b. Personal hygiene 30 min to an hour each day
 - c. Eat 2 hrs/day
 - d. Exercise 30 min 3-5 days/week + the possible commute to the gym = 1hr
2. Friendship with Christ
 - a. 30 min/day in Meditation/Rosary
 - b. Frequent the Eucharist and Reconciliation
3. Time for Friendship with your spouse, kids, friends
 - a. 1-2 hours each day
4. Meaningful Work 8 hrs/day
 - a. ***In*** the home or ***out***
 - b. 1 hour for the possible commute
5. Knowledge - Learn about what interests you
6. Experience beauty in its many forms

That’s about 23 hours – you can have all that each day with an hour to spare.

Be creative in combining two or more of these at one time (walking and talking with a spouse or friend at sunset gives you friendship, exercise, and beauty).

Our problem is that we have

- Too much of some ingredients
- Too little of others
- And in some instances - the wrong ingredients – harmful or at least unfulfilling ingredients

We must examine our life honestly:

- Do I have the right ingredients in my life?
- Do I have the right priorities? Do I put first things first; and second things second? God is first and everything else is second.
- Do I make enough time for a deep friendship with God through daily meditation, frequent reception of the Eucharist and Reconciliation?
- Am I going to bed on time or wasting the last hour of my night?
- Do I exercise regularly?
- Do I have meaningful work? Am I working too much or too little?
- Am I giving enough time to the essential relationships in my life?
- Am I pursuing truth, knowledge, a better understanding of God, my faith, the world...?
- Am I delighting in beauty through nature, people, books, music... or do I waste time in entertainment? Beauty leads us to a greater contact with reality and hence with God. Entertainment on the other hand offers an escape from reality because it is a distortion of reality – an alternative to reality.
- Do I have wrong ingredients in my life - those that will spoil the recipe?
- Then there are things that should just never go in any recipe – like rat poison. What is the rat poison in your life - things like addictions, anger, gossip, lack of gratitude, lust...

For most of us, this process of living well of getting our priorities right and living according to those priorities begins by getting rid of things that don't belong there.

This is where Jesus said:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna” (Matt 5:29-30).

We all have sinful habits. Things that we habitually think, say, or do that are ruining our happiness – ruining our recipe.

Identify those sinful habits, routines, triggers, or occasions that lead us into the sin. It's not enough to get the weeds – we've got to get the roots as well.

As a Resolution:

Identify 2-3 concrete and realistic things you will commit to change.

Then create a Rule of Life and share it with your spouse or a friend, so that they won't inadvertently work against you, and they can help you.

To be set free from all the temptations and evil that prevent us from living a happy and peaceful life, let's end with the prayer of St. Benedict found on the back of the St. Benedict medal:

"Begone Satan! Never tempt me with your vanities! What you offer me is evil. Drink the poison yourself!"

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