

## Monastic Scribe XXXII: July 19, 2022

### Am I A Grown-Up?

One of the finest books in contemporary Christian literature that I have found is called “Falling Upward” written by Richard Rohr, O.F.M.\*, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. It is clearly written and is both inspiring and challenging. My short version of his teaching holds that there are two basic halves of life (not necessarily chronological in order). Not everyone gets from the first to the second half successfully. Religion tends to be stuck in the first half.

In the first half of life we need to establish our identity, our ego, our competency to act, work, be creative. We find ourselves, learn to socialize and take part in society. We accomplish such things as raising a family, achieving in business, obtaining educational degrees, making a name for ourselves. In religious matters we learn the guidelines, rules and basic beliefs of our religious tradition.

Then comes a time to question all we have done. Is this all there is? The temptation is to go back and try harder. Or go on a fling in new relationships or other forms of escape. The real call is now to develop an interior life. If, in the first half of life, we have built a tower, it is now time to jump off. Or, in Thomas Merton’s phrase, we have been climbing a ladder against a building and now discover we have climbed the wrong building. Some suffering is often needed to make us move on and inwards. Like Alcoholics in twelve step programs, we have to hit bottom and accept that we are not in control. We must hand over our lives to a higher power.

The call to the second half of life is a call to freedom, to real life and satisfaction and meaning. It is to realize we have been wearing masks, playing roles, carrying out the expectations of others. It is to admit that we had to wear masks and play roles and we may still have to do that but we are now aware that it is not really us and we have a true self to uncover. This is a time of freedom. We come to really know that God loves us as we are, not as we think we ought to be, or what others expect us to be. We can truly be ourselves.

But uncovering and finding our true selves takes some work, times of silence and reflection. Basic as it may seem (but more difficult than we have believed) we have to really know ourselves. This begins, strangely enough, by acknowledging what is called the shadow of our lives – the parts we have tried to hide, may be ashamed of, the actual way we come across to others but are not aware of

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ourselves. Rohr calls this “shadow boxing”, to come to really acknowledge and accept our shadow. No shame or guilt involved, just truth and humility. How freeing this can be! Of course, then we must let go of these traits and faults, trust God to be with us in all things. It means we stop having to promote ourselves, stop judging others, stop our seeing life as black and white, good and bad. This isn’t accomplished in a day. We may backslide at times but we learn to catch ourselves succumbing to our shadow and learn to let go when we realize we are trying to hide it again.

There are some ways to help us grow in our true selves. Having a mentor, a spiritual director, or a true friend in whom we can articulate all of this can really help. Taking time to write what we feel and see about ourselves (and then go back later to see if there is any change) can also help us face the truth.

I have had surgery a few times in the past few years. Then the pandemic came along necessitating times of isolation and loneliness. I feel a change in myself that I can hardly understand. But I know I feel freer. I have come to write this blog and easily say what I think. I know I can be wrong at times but then I can admit I am wrong. I don’t have to be right all the time. I have to be myself as God has made me, as God sees me, as God loves me. I tell you it is a challenge. The old me can resist, can want to be right, can want to be admired. But I really know better and can catch myself more readily.

I believe Jesus and his vision and teaching all lead us to be the human beings that we really are. The world, the culture, our jobs drive us to choose other ways of living than Jesus does. Knowing that there is a second half of life where we can work on finding our true selves is a relief, a challenge, and a blessing. Have you begun to experience anything like this? You can contact me at:

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\*Richard Rohr, OFM, “Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life”, Jossey-Bass Books, 2011.

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.