

**“Questions For The Average Person”**

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

I have some questions for the “average person.” First, “Which is more important, making money or being devoted to your family?” Ask the average person that question and virtually everyone will answer, “Family” without hesitation. But watch how the average person actually lives life. See where he really invests time and energy, and he will give away the fact that we do not always live by what we say we believe. He has become persuaded that if he leaves for work earlier in the morning and comes home tired at night, he is proving how devoted he is to the family by expending all that time and effort to provide them with all the things that they have seen advertised.

An ancient story is told of a king who was suffering from a certain ailment and advised by his astrologer that he would be cured if the shirt of a contented man were brought to him to wear. People went to all parts of the kingdom after such a person, and after a long search they found a man who was really happy, but he did not possess a shirt.

Another question. “Which means more, the approval of strangers or the affection of people doesn’t to you?” Ask the average person which means more and they will not be able to understand why you would ask such a dumb question. Obviously, nothing means more to them than their family and their closest friends.

Yet, how often have we embarrassed our children or squelched their spontaneity, for fear of what neighbours or strangers might think? How often have we poured out our anger or displeasure on those closest to us because we had a hard day at work or someone else did something to upset us? A little more humorous example, how many of us have let ourselves become irritable with our families because we were dieting to make ourselves look more attractive to people who do not know us well enough to see beyond appearances?

One more question. “What does the average person want out of life?” The average person will probably reply, “All I want is to be happy,” and you know what, I believe that. I believe that most people want to be happy. I believe that we work hard at making ourselves happy. We buy books, attend classes, change our lifestyles, in an ongoing effort to find that elusive quality – happiness. In spite of all that, I respect that many people much of the time do not feel happy. As Henry David Thoreau has said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

Oscar Wilde once wrote, “In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.” He was trying to warn us no matter how hard we work at being successful, success will not satisfy us. By the time we get there, having sacrificed so much on the altar of being successful, we will realize that success was not what we wanted.

An anonymous friar in a monastery once wrote words. “If I had my life to live over again, I’d try to make more mistakes next time. I would relax, I would limber up, I would be sillier, than I have been. I know of very few things I would take seriously. I would take more trips. I would be crazier. I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets. I would do more walking and looking. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would have more actual troubles and fewer imaginary ones. You see, I’m one of those people who lives life sensibly hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I’ve had my moments, and if I had to do it over again, I’d have more of them. In fact, I’d try to have nothing else, just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead each day. I’ve been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat, aspirin, and a parachute. If I had to do it over again, I would go places, do things and travel lighter than I have. If I had

my life to live over again, I would start barefooted earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would play hockey more. I wouldn't make such good grades, except by accident. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daisies."

Friends, if you asked the average person, "If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?", what do you think they would say? What would you say?

By now you've figured out this is not a biblical exegetical sermon, save that for next week, so here is one more vignette to reflect on. There is an old "Peanuts" cartoon – Snoopy is sitting on top of his doghouse when Charlie Brown comes with a note. Charlie says, "It's a letter from your brother, Spike." "Dear Snoopy, something wonderful happened, a man came by here and offered to sell me a magic cape. He told me that if I wore this magic cape I would be transported to a land of paradise. He said the cape was on sale, so not wanting to miss such a bargain, I gave him my only dollar."

The next panel shows Spike spending his time in the desert contemplating the meaning of life. Then we switch back to Charlie reading to Snoopy. "So by the time you get this letter, I'll be living in paradise." Then Spike is pictured again on the desert floor among the cactus, cape draped over his shoulders, saying, "Then again, maybe I've been had."

My brothers and sisters in Christ. In this life that we live, too many people have been had. There are no magic capes. There is no one key that will guarantee happiness. In fact, that old saying about death and taxes being the only things we can count on would seem to ensure unhappiness. Ask the average person and you will hear that we live in a messed up world, a world where people fly planes into buildings, where adults sometimes do unspeakable things to children, a world where unspeakable horrors occur every day all over the world. There will always be low times. In fact, there will be times you get so far down that you cannot remember up. But when those times come, remember this. You are not alone. You've got a friend, one whom scripture says sticks closer than a brother – Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who issues an invitation, in today's gospel reading, an invitation, in today's gospel reading, an invitation that reaches down to us no matter how deep we are. This is what Jesus says:

"Come to me, all you, that are weary. All who are carrying heavy burdens, guilt, pain, despair. All that keeps you from being happy. Come, and I will give you rest.

AMEN.