

In the 1960s was a hit song by Hal David and Burt Bacharach entitled *Alfie*. Does anyone remember that song? It begins with the words “What’s it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live? What’s it all about when you sort it out, Alfie? Are we meant to take more than we give, or are we meant to be kind?” I believe this song reflects the wonderings of today’s scripture about the meaning of life and how possessions fit into that meaning.

Let’s use the metaphor of a dance to explore how God is inviting us to find life’s meaning and use our possessions.

First, a slow dance. a dance of contemplation, where we slow down and take time to reflect. Stan and I slow down and reflect when we slow dance to the song *Alfie*. We can also reflect in a dedicated prayer time, where we are faithful to showing up to be with God in stillness. Another way to use this prayer time is by asking God to show us how to handle a situation or how we could have better responded to an experience we’ve already had. In addition to a dedicated prayer time, we can dance contemplatively by taking “pause” moments in our day. This past week I experienced a special “pause” dance while we were in the Adirondacks in New York. As I took an early morning walk basking in the sunshine and refreshing breeze, I felt drawn to the quiet of this moment. I walked through a cemetery and reflected on the many people who had lived before me. Each of them had a different life span and lived in various social contexts dating back to post-Civil war times through today. I contemplated the dash between their dates of birth and death and how each had made a unique contribution with their life. I found a connection with those who had lived, with myself living now, and with the beautiful mountains surrounding us that have been since forever. In this pause I found myself participating in a contemplative dance of our connection throughout time. A third type of slow dance is contemplative conversation. We have done this in community discernment. We can

also do this in conversation with one another on topics of importance—whether that be a decision to move, a health issue, a financial decision, or a faith question. In these conversations openness, deep listening, and a willingness to respond thoughtfully rather than in a reactive way, are keys to a contemplative stance.

Whether it be a dedicated prayer time, a “pause” moment, or a conversation, a slow dance is essential to healthy grappling with the daily struggles and good discernment of the deeper questions of life. It is a critical part of the sorting out of life, highlighted in the song *Alfie*, and the setting of priorities mentioned in Jesus’ parable.

The second dance style is an action one, like the twist, jitterbug, or the gyrations we go through to “*shout*.” In the action dance of life we find the struggles, doubts, and anxieties that our reading from Ecclesiastes speaks of and the tension between life’s priorities and use of possessions that Jesus speaks about in Luke. Here is where we need a contemplative stance to sort out the action so that our priorities are aligned with God’s ways, and our use of our gifts and possessions are in line with those priorities. When we talk of possessions here, we’re including not only physical ones but also inner gifts such as intellect, honesty, compassion, and justice.

Let’s now illustrate an action dance. Last Sunday our daughter Tahra completed an Ironman triathlon—a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike ride, and 26.2 mile run. Tahra is a gifted athlete, but her athletic gifts were pushed to the limit in this one! She trained for about 6 months, so she was prepared physically, nutritionally, and mentally for the challenge. Certainly she did this because of her love of sports and desire for a personal challenge, and she was using her God-given talents to compete. But this went deeper than pure athleticism. In doing this event, Tahra raised money for Alzheimers’ Research in honor of her mom-mom. She also wore a lacrosse jersey during the marathon run in honor her friend and lacrosse teammate who died in May. I

believe Love was at the heart of her motivation to compete—love of sports, love for her mom, and love for her friend. Her effusive appreciation that friends and family came to watch, wait, and cheer as we supported and encouraged her at multiple points along the way also reflected Love. Her priorities were clear, and we experienced God through her love and her loving use of inner gifts and physical attributes. There was also a tenuous moment during the bike portion where priorities were in sync with love. A 3-year-old girl had gotten beyond the barricades and was in the middle of the competition path. The 30 seconds she was in danger seemed like an eternity. Fortunately the bikers were able to slow down and dodge her, and a course official ran over and lifted her to safety. In this moment the priority quickly shifted from competition to helping this toddler. Here was a dance of quick-thinking action by the bikers and the official that enfolded God's Love.

Action moments encompass many things, whether it be a situation at work, home, in our neighborhood, or on our travels. These action moments call us to the dance of looking beneath the surface, finding the priority, and making choices congruent with it. Contemplative and action dances each have their own steps, yet are intimately connected if we are to live the gospel message of Love.

As we dance through the coming week, I encourage you to integrate contemplative moments into your everyday action. Ponder what you hear in these reflective moments as you form and re-create the priorities in your life.

Keep dancing the songs of life—and remember God's always there partnering with you.

*Scripture Readings—18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2: 21-23  
Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11  
Luke 12: 13-21

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