

I came that you may have life and have it to the full.

With this saying of Jesus attributed to the Gospel of John a variety of images come to mind including happiness, well-being, fulfillment and old age.

The reality is that Jesus didn't come to do it all but enabled people to take responsibility for their own lives with the guidance and wisdom of those around them. Consider what Jesus models for us in his encounters with people, he treats everyone with dignity, compassion and honesty but he does not create dependency. He allows for human agency. There are many gospel accounts where after his encounters with people he leaves them to find their way; the freedom to choose how they want to proceed with their won lives.



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"Freedom not only allows [humanity] suitability to modify the state of things outside of himself, but it also determines the growth of his being as a person through choices consistent with the true good" (SDCC #135). Freedom allows for the person to become responsible for their own growth process (SDCC # 133). This freedom enables human agency and the flourishing of people. Human agency is a function of human dignity that must be recognized in all social justice work if a person is to strive for, and reach their potential. A person's right to determine their own destiny directly impacts on their sense of happiness and well-being.

Happiness and well-being are subjective and depend on peoples perceptions of themselves and their communities. If one considers the happiness and well-being of the lepers and "sinners" of Jesus' time, how did they perceive themselves as a result of the treatment they received from their local and religious community? How did their negative experience impact on their hopes and aspirations? Why did Jesus engage with those who experienced poverty, discrimination and isolation? Maybe because their capacity to "have life and have it to the full" was thwarted. Poverty and exclusion impacts on how human needs are fulfilled. It affects human agency and therefore human flourishing (Regan 2010).

What does Jesus do for the poor and the outcast of his time? He didn't have an over-all approach to the needs of these people. He approached each person differently and in many cases there was some level of dialogue before he responded to their request. Jesus when responding to the shouting of the blind men Matthew 20: 30 asked them what they wanted him to do for them, he didn't just respond to the call for pity. He let them have some say in what action they required him to do (20:33).

Consequently Jesus opens up new opportunities for them, thereby creating new possibilities of self understanding and self acceptance which would allow them to flourish. Now to flourish involves "feeling well, living well, and doing well, enjoying goods of the mind, enjoying goods of the body, relational goods, and external goods" (Nicholas 2007). All of which contribute to

having a sense of meaning in life and opens up for people their "capacity for God" (GS #12). When a person has the space, "when he[she] reflects on his[her] destiny, he[she] discovers that he[she] is superior to the material world because of his[her] unique dignity as one who converses with God, under whose gaze he makes decisions about his[her] life" (SDCC # 128).

Human flourishing does not happen in isolation as most people grow as a result of relating to others in some way. Jesus moved among communities of people, ministering with groups who are not flourishing as human beings. What was the impact of showing one person in that group respect or dignity; the blind man, the woman of Samaria? Like a ripple in a pond this will affect those around them because one change causes other change in our human interconnectedness.

The impact of the encounter with the women at the well transforms the life of the woman who in turn brings Jesus into her own community an enormous change in their lives. Think of the impact it has in a family living in poverty when a child manages to go to third level education or on traveler girls when a female traveler completes secondary education and also goes to third level education. It lifts people out of their internalised oppression and perhaps their own limited perception of what is possible for them to do or achieve.

Jesus' approach was personal. This is quite a challenge today when it is easy to throw money at the issue of poverty hoping it will address the causes of it. It will help some people but it doesn't address the consequences. The reality is that human beings are all different and the call to live our human vocation is different for each. The question of human flourishing and well being is not just about income, it is about services, neighbours and having the opportunity and possibility of reaching ones potential.

What do people need so they can freely choose to live as God desires, to be co-creators with God? The provision of human rights is a start, for human rights violations on an individual don't just affect the person but the wider community (Regan 112). After this, perhaps the question should not be answered by someone like me writing this reflection. How do I or we know unless we take the time to chat and ask those whose lives do not enable them to flourish! In responding to their stated need, we like Jesus need to avoid creating dependency, allowing the person their own agency to make decisions for their own life.

"The preferential option for the poor has a *telos* [end] that is marked by a vision of human flourishing for all that is offered by the Reign of God" (Regan, p. 152), the fullness of life. In choosing this option our role is to walk along side others, listen and enable our companions to open up their dream for their lives and then ask, "what do you want me to do for you?"

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