

“To do” lists and prayers

My daughter took a time management course for self-employed people a few years ago. She learned to do her preparation for the next day each night, before she went to bed. She considered tomorrow’s schedule; she gathered the documents she would need; she organized them. Then she could sleep, knowing she was ready for the morning.

By some coincidence, my friend Bob Thompson applied a similar system. But he got his advice out of a book of Celtic blessings.

Bob used to wake up in the middle of the night, worrying. If the worry that actually woke him wasn’t serious enough to keep him awake for the rest of the night, his mind soon found something bigger to worry about.

In that book of Celtic blessings, Bob found an evening prayer that began: “Tonight, God of rest, as I lie down in bed, I rest. I rest my hopes, my fears, my longings, my thankfulness...” And then he could add, he said, “a whole litany of laying to rest all the things that are stirring me right now, good and bad. And I consciously lay them to rest for the night.”

That doesn’t actually get anything done, of course. But it helps Bob identify what he has to deal with when he wakes up, and often what he needs to do about it. “Then if I wake in the night,” Bob said, “I can tell myself that I have made the decision to lay everything to rest until the morning. And the issues usually go away,” he concluded, “at least for that night.”

Preparing for what’s coming

Both practices strike me as resembling the “to do” lists that I make, almost obsessively. These days, I simply write a few notes on those little memo pads that charities keep sending me, hoping they’ll buy my loyalty. But for a while, while I was part owner of a publishing house, I developed a computer spreadsheet for my “to do” lists.

I graded the jobs by urgency and importance. Completing one major job might earn me 20 points for the day. Fussing away at ten small tasks might take just as long, but only earn me one point each.

Obviously, my score at the end of each day depended on the points I had assigned to each task. I tried not to cheat – I just wanted to make sure I didn’t

ignore the crucial jobs, because the little ones were easier to accomplish.

Until I heard Bob Thompson's experience, I had never thought of a "to do" list as a form of prayer. But why not? It helps me identify my priorities. To recognize what's important. To evaluate my own capabilities.

I don't expect God to do any of those jobs for me. I don't, and won't, believe in a deity who diddles with reality to assist believers and impede unbelievers. But simply preparing that list in an attitude of prayer – rather than frustration – helps to put my mind into harmony with what AA calls "a power greater than myself."

Perhaps I should re-name my "to do" lists as my prayer lists.

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YOUR TURN

Last week's column on the connections between gardening and faith seems to have connected with quite a few of you. Perhaps it was a pleasant break from some fairly heavy columns about theology? I actually had people stop me on the street to tell me how much they liked that column.

Christine Way Skinner wrote, "Gardening is one of my most important prayer forms. As I haul out each weed, some so obvious and some smaller and which need more detailed attention, I think of all that needs to be culled from my life, whether it be sin or unessentials that prevent me or those around me from blossoming. As I take care of the weaker plants, I think of those parts of myself or my family which need the little extra TLC to thrive. And when I have to reign in the invasive flowers, I think of those beauties in my life -- personality traits, people, hobbies, etc., -- which though beautiful, tend to bully or overshadow more delicate but equally beautiful flowers. Sometimes I'm a bad gardener (by aesthetic standards) because when a beautiful flower turns up in the wrong place I sometimes just leave it alone, admiring it's tenacity and will to survive. Live and let life, I think. When weeding is done, I get to just settle back with a cup of tea in the yard and rejoice in the beauty that surrounds me and seeing the fruits of my labour."

Rachel Pritchard forwarded an article by Roger Campbell, called “Gardening with God.” You can find it at <http://www.sourcenewspapers.com/articles/2014/06/02/opinion/doc53873d6640dda468755200.txt>.

She also wrote, “I also think you would enjoy [Doug Green's Perennial](#) website and [Doug Greens Garden blog](#) with their humorous advice. Not only has Doug been a gardener for a lifetime but remains a kind and gentle human being with his advice on gardening for beginners and experts alike. You can not only find a wealth of information to help you, but he washes away all thoughts that you might actually know anything about gardening at all with his gentle humour and irony! He also dispels all gardening myths and old wives' tales while giving you very concrete advice at the same time. If you are serious about gardening, like him on facebook, sign up for emails or just browse his sites and you won't regret it.”

Frank Martens supplied the verse I (inaccurately) recalled my mother quoting about prayer and gardening. He says it comes from Rudyard Kipling, who was a favoured poet of my parents' generation:

**“Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees
That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees,
So when your work is finished, you can wash your hand and pray
For the Glory of the Garden, that it may not pass away!”**

John Shaffer “ just spent 3 weeks on a trip and the weeds are ahead of me. When it is real bad, I count how many I pull, one by one, by the hundreds. It keeps me going and I do see results.”

And Paul Coffman wrote, “I have gardened all my life and it is such a healthy and positive thing to do, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Gardening induces (almost compels) meditation. Someone has said, ‘We come from the dust. We return to the dust. In-between we garden.’

“As to having a relationship with a garden, I think so.”

PSALM PARAPHRASES

So here we go with Trinity Sunday. Although the Trinity is never mentioned in the Old Testament, we have to have a psalm to go with it, and fortunately, it's one of my favourites – Psalm 8.

My God, my God,
how wonderful you are!
There is nothing like you in the whole earth.

I look up to the skies, and I see you there;
Babies and infants open their mouths, and I hear them cry your name.
You have an aura that silences your enemies,
it keeps your opponents disarmed.

I look out into the universe, the infinite distances of creation,
sparkling with scattered diamonds,
and I feel so insignificant.
Why should you even notice me?
Why should you care about a mere mortal?

Yet you chose me to be your partner;
you have shared the secrets of the universe with me.
You have made me responsible for everything I see --
the rocks and trees,
the birds and bees,
everything that exists in this wonderful world.

My God, my God, how wonderful you are!

For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the RCL, you can order my book *Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publishing, info@woodlake.com.

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

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For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at jimt@quixotic.ca, or send a note to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca
