

Be At Ease with Your Inner Self

Luke 9.23-27:

Who knows what the 4 pillars of the good Rathkeale man are?

Today I want to discuss the first one

There were originally 3 and the 4th one was suggested by the Chaplain at the time – James Clark.

This pillar suggests that we have a relationship with our self. This relationship has stages to it.

The first stage is when you become aware of yourself and you become self-conscious. This is something that you will all be experiencing but is more vivid perhaps for Juniors.

I remember my brother at 13 or 14 being very self-conscious (trying to look at his shoes or watch himself walking, not wanting to walk with his family, being always embarrassed)

The key thing to understand at this stage is that people are not looking at you as much as they are looking at themselves. We are really concerned about ourselves.

This can then develop into a strongly self-critical inner talk. This can then go one of two ways. We either suppress our inner talk and then project it onto others, or we become completely overwhelmed by it and struggle with anxiety and depression.

Those who repress their negative inner talk will put it onto other people. They can become very harsh, or be full of bravado, or become bullies. These people seem very confident and can be loud and dominating. That is because they are treating others the way their inner talk is treating themselves. If they feel not good enough, they will try and make others feel not good enough. If they feel ashamed, they will try and shame others. Because they feel bad, they will make others feel bad. You can guarantee that anyone who teases others, or always makes out that they are the man does so because they feel insecure about themselves.

If, on the other hand, you are a more self-aware person, then you may struggle with low self-esteem. You won't turn this inner talk onto others,

but will turn it all on yourself. You will then perhaps feel afraid of being around others, because you think they all see you as a loser. Or you will be so overwhelmed with negative thoughts about yourself that you will get depressed. Sorry to say it boys, but due to being more self-aware than boys, girls often suffer this way more than boys do. But the more self-aware boys will also suffer in this way.

Most people at college will resonate with these descriptions, because college is when these feelings are at their peak. They still continue on into adulthood, but you all here must begin the journey of becoming at ease with your inner self. Whether through the help of family, friends, partner, a counsellor, or just the perspective that getting older can give you, you must all come to see that you are OK. You are no less than anyone else. We are all of value, all lovable, all acceptable, regardless of our individual differences. There is no ranking of human beings, even though college is dominated by this illusory ranking system of who is cool or who is popular and who is not. If you develop healthily, you will come to be at ease with your inner self, and come to appreciate and love yourself. It is essential. It is more important than anything else you learn in your life. No one can give it to you. You have to give it to yourself. Sadly, even some adults will not reach this stage.

Although the later stages of our relationship with ourselves usually only develop around midlife, there is a small percentage who may encounter this earlier. At this stage, we begin to gradually loosen our focus on ourselves.

You see, the self is actually a heavy burden, and the source of our suffering. And we actually spend a lot of time trying to free ourselves from ourselves. There are lots of unhealthy ways to do this. Drugs and alcohol being the most common. These substances can give us a temporary break from ourselves, and makes us feel completely unselfconscious and free for a short time. But they often leave us feeling worse about ourselves afterwards. Some people are forever trying to lose themselves in relationships, either in the sexual act itself, or in complete infatuation and surrender to another person whom they think will save them in some way. These addictions are no more helpful than drugs or alcohol.

Those who reach the later stages of self-development will reach the stages of what Psychologists have called self-actualisation. At this stage, a person is no longer dominated by feeling that they lack anything and can begin to abandon their focus on their self. This actually often

happens through some kind of crisis. Some kind of giving up of the plans they had to make themselves a success, or some other experience that teaches them that the way forward is to let go, to give up trying to control the world, or to be a success or to become something that will finally make them OK. Only a percentage of people will make it to these later stages, but when they do, they will usually begin to experience the freedom that comes with self-abandonment. This is what Jesus meant when he said that those who lose their lives will save them. This is at the heart of his message.

At this point, we are more able to live fully in the moment, and able to absorb ourselves in something bigger and greater than ourselves. It is usually some form of important work or a spiritual, artistic or even sporting endeavour. When we can begin to enter into this experience, then we begin to touch on the deeper, spiritual side of life. In sport, this experience has been studied and is called flow. Top performers in sport, but also in many other endeavours, often report magical experiences of self abandonment and feeling part of something greater at this level. I want to read a quote from Basketball Legend Bill Russell, who played for the Celtics. He wrote:

Every so often a Celtic game would heat up so that it became more than a physical or even mental game, and would be magical. That feeling is difficult to describe, and I certainly never talked about it when I was playing. When it happened I could feel my play rise to a new level.. It would surround not only me and the other Celtics but also the players on the other team, and even the referees.

... The feeling would spread to the other guys, and we'd all levitate. And then the game would just take off, and there'd be a natural ebb and flow that reminded you of how rhythmic and musical basketball is supposed to be. I'd find myself thinking, "This is it. I want this to keep going," and I'd actually be rooting for the other team. When their players made spectacular moves, I wanted their shots to go in the bucket. That's how pumped up I'd be. I'd be out there talking to the other Celtics, encouraging them and pushing myself harder, but at the same time part of me would be pulling for the other players too.

At that special level all sorts of odd things happened. The game would be in a white heat of competition, and yet somehow I wouldn't feel competitive -- which is a miracle in itself. I'd be putting out the maximum effort, straining, coughing up parts of my lungs as we ran, and yet I never felt the pain. The game would move so quickly that every fake, cut

and pass would be surprising, and yet nothing could surprise me. Even before the other team brought the ball in bounds, I could feel it so keenly that I'd want to shout to my teammates, "It's coming there!" -- except that I knew everything would change if it did. My premonitions would be consistently correct, and I always felt then that I not only knew all the Celtics by heart but also all the opposing players, and they knew me. There have been many times in my career when I felt moved or joyful, but these were the moments when I had chills pulsing up and down my spine.

Sometimes the feeling would last all the way to the end of the game, and when that happened I never cared who won. I can honestly say that those few times were the only ones when I did not care. On the five or ten occasions when the game ended at that special level, I literally did not care who had won. If we lost, I'd still be as free and as high as a sky hawk.

We are all on a journey, and we are in a relationship with ourselves. You are all in the early stages of this relationship. What matters most for you is that you learn to be at ease with your inner self. Love yourself. Like yourself. And then one day you may reach that stage where you get to experience the deep truth that we are all OK, that we are actually all one in a way that goes beyond our understanding. There are no winners and losers in life. Just all winners, because we are all loved and accepted children of God.