

The other day, I watched a movie, *The Hurt Locker*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow. The director depicted the human psyche of those who brush with death every day. It has received a whole bunch of awards in America, and the top recognition in Great Britain. The story is about a team of Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit that clears Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) hidden in the streets of Baghdad.

The main character is the soldier who is very good at disarming the bombs. He is a regular guy, with a wife and a child at home. He knows that there is zero margin of error in his work. Yet he is so into his job, he would often drag his teammates to the brink of death, in pursuit of getting the job done. For that, he wins a lot of "thanks" from his teammates. He survives many close calls that split the thinnest of the hair. He comes home, but he soon decides to return to the battle field for another tour of the same.

The movie caused me to think about what makes one a hero. I found that there are many kinds of heroes. The first is the kind who does his or her job to the point that his or her life is put in the harm's way. Every one of them all plan to come home and kiss the spouse and child after the shift is over. But the nature of their job often forces them to enter the area, or the situation, that might kill them. The police, military, and the firefighters are those.

The second kind are the ones who are regular people like you and me, who go about their daily lives, sitting at the desk, driving the bus, or working the cashier. But they make the split-second decisions, forgetting about their own welfare or their spouses or kids, and do things that make them heroes. They save other people's lives, often survive the dangerous situations, and feel very awkward with the newly-found 15 minutes of fame. They invariably return to their own lives, and are soon forgotten by the mass media and people.

They are best described as accidental heroes.

Then there is the third kind. This is the kind of people who know that they are going to die, unless they turn back. But they press on any way. Their sense of the duty, or the goal, is so defined and determined, that they would not take it any other ways. They are often seen in the agony within themselves. Yet they cannot undo their sense of mission. They usually do not survive to tell the story. Only their posterity extols their feat.

The character in the movie has an element of the many described above. The viewers are not sure, if their man is mission driven, or adrenaline driven. We are not sure, if the man is a hero, or an adrenaline junkie. The director shows with subtlety the complex aspects of her main character, and forces the viewers hesitate at least for one moment from going all out and making him an unabashed hero in the pablovian manner.

That brings us to shift our focus, and to look at Jesus. What kind of a hero is Jesus? Jesus fits the last type, since he did not hold a job that puts him in a dangerous situation, and was not an accidental one. He predicted to his disciples at least three times that he would be killed in Jerusalem. He was a determined one whose mind was singularly made up to go to Jerusalem. His death was not unforeseeably and accidentally thrust upon him. There were forces that engineered his death, and Jesus knew about them, well before hand.

The process of framing Jesus and having him killed involved the top Hebrew judicial body, Sanhedrin; the heads of the state, Herod and Philip; and the authority of the Roman prefect. These three bodies of power are similar to the bodies accused of corruption in Prophet Micah:

⁹ Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, ¹⁰ who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem

with wrong. ¹¹ Its heads give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for hire, its prophets divine for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us." ¹² Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

When Jesus talks about Jerusalem, Jesus does not merely mean as the geographical location, but Jerusalem as the hub of power where judicial, political, and religious elites flex their muscles. These elites could make things happen, and people could lose their lives—be it in Jerusalem, in the lonely byway, or on the deserted mountain top.

Micah addressed directly at the heads of the state, the ruling class of Israel. He aggravated the bodies of power with the accusation: the rulers for the political corruption and the judicial perversion, and the priests and prophets for the religious venality. The elites failed to heed their calling, and

Micah pointed it out to them that their God is very angry at them.

I see two kinds of armies. One value their soldiers' lives, so preserving their lives is the top priority. They care for the morale, so they have entertainment, hot showers, and TV. The foot soldiers all want to come home alive.

The other army do not value much of their soldiers' lives. They care only for the military objectives and missions. Their men are dirty; but their rifles are clean. They do not have T.V. or hot showers. The top brass do not mind the casualty. The foot soldiers do not shun away from death. They would rather die than see the enemy win. How hard is it to overcome the enemy who has nothing to lose, whose priority is not survival?

What is the ultimate mission for any soldier on the tour? Does preserving one's life take priority over fulfilling one's mission? What would you say the authentic calling for a soldier is?

What, then, is the ultimate mission for any Christian who has embarked on the faith journey? What can the devil do to a Christian who is willing to give up his or her life for his mission? If one is not willing to devote one's life to his own faith journey, or give up one's life for one's mission, that faith journey has yet to become the authentic calling. Perhaps, the authentic calling—or something that is most precious—has yet to be found elsewhere. The authentic calling inescapably attracts the Christian who is on the faith journey.

The regular guys are all on their own ways, doing what they are supposed to do until the moment they suddenly become heroes, to their surprise. Some have become heroes unintentionally, unexpectedly, or accidentally. Others have become heroes, just because they stayed on course, in spite of the daily grind, or despite all the dangers and toils.

Our faith journey is much like that: we do our work today and

tomorrow, and be on our way the next day. We are regular people doing what we do. We may have our own mundane goals. We may have made our own share of mistakes and failures. We rarely seek to be a hero. Maybe, we do not find much meaning in doing our work today and tomorrow; yet the next day we are on our way to do more of the same. We may not care that our works would not make us heroes in anyone's eyes.

Then there are others who may cling to their accomplishment, their income, their titles, their connections that make them who they are. Their sense of self-identity and self-importance depends on what they wear outside, rather than what they have *inside*. That sense of self-identity and self-importance overrides almost everything else in life.

What determines the authenticity of one's calling? Is the authenticity of one's calling determined by one's achievement, success, and possession? If, on

the other hand, one goes through the daily grind at the dead-end job, low-paying job, or under-appreciated job, that person cannot possibly fulfill his or her authentic calling? Then, only the elites are the ones who can fulfill their calling. And it was the elites whom Micah assailed in his prophesy; it was the elites who condemned Jesus.

Authentic calling is realized when we stay on our way today, tomorrow, and the next day. No one can prove one's calling, by switching from one thing to the next every once in a while. We are inescapably attracted to the authentic calling, once we found it. We may not prove it today or tomorrow; but we may prove the next day what is more precious than life.

Heroes seem to know instinctively the answer to the question: what is more precious than life? One day we will prove with our action what is more precious than life. Heroes are not born; heroes are made from the daily grind. Each one who is

on the faith journey today, tomorrow, and the next day, is potentially a hero.

May this Lent bring to you the discernment of the authentic calling.