

Do you know what the greatest blessing in life is? It is not hitting the lottery jackpot. The greatest blessing in life is meeting the right person. I met a fresh recruit in my military service. He was so happy to meet the girl of his dream. He courted her, and finally popped the question. She said yes, and he gave her the matching diamond ring and the pair of diamond earrings for the engagement. That young man was the happiest man on base. He was always smiling, so relaxed, and so easy-going.

A few months later, the girl unilaterally announced that it was over. It hit him like a piano that fell from the fourth floor. Apparently, she had met even more exciting guy, and changed her mind about with whom she would spend the next part of her life. The grief-stricken man then asked for the gifts to be returned. She told him she was sorry she lost them.

A few weeks later, he spotted her flaunting the jewelry, alongside

her new beau. The young man was distraught. But he got over it, by accepting the whole thing as the lesson at the Life University, whose expensive tuition he paid with some jewelry and heartaches. One could call him a wiser man, but he was not the same man any more: something in him was lost.

You need to meet the right parents, the right teacher, the right mentor, the right friends, and the right spouse, in order to learn the ropes of life properly and advance quickly, without the unnecessary faltering and pain, along the competitive career track and life. I think that that is what most people would accept as the best, but that does not mean it necessarily works for everyone.

Sometimes, one needs to go through the life lessons the hard way, and pay for them with costly tuitions, in order to learn the ropes. One pays life's lessons with the tuition in time, money, heartaches, and lost youth and opportunities.

As parents, we know about these things. For we ourselves had gone through them before. Maybe some of us were blessed enough to grow up with loving parents, caring mentors, and enough resources. Maybe some of us were smart enough to catch the drift early on, and did not have to waste time on distractions, or struggle with obstructions. But most of us know that we have had our share of paying life's tuitions. Maybe, some of us are still paying them, who knows?

We do not want our children, therefore, to repeat the same, unwanted, and costly mistakes. But the children have their own learning curves, and parents can do only so much about it. The old adage stands: you can bring the horse to the water, but it is the horse that has to want to drink the water.

For the 12 disciples, I can say that they were probably the luckiest. They not only met Jesus, but also were hand-picked by Jesus himself to be his

disciples! How lucky can you get?

I am sure they felt good about having Jesus as their teacher. Their teacher, as it turned out, was a holy man with special abilities. They saw with their own eyes the miracles that Jesus performed: they ate the miraculous fish and bread, saw the blind receive the sight, the lame walk, saw unclean spirits cast out, and even the dead rise from the dead. How privileged and fantastic they must have felt, when they themselves were able to duplicate what Jesus did. I am sure they thought they got it made.

Meeting the greatest teacher one can ever have is not everything. It does not guarantee that you will be able to process everything, get ahead with success, or grow to be a mature and wise human being. The same can be said for the 12 disciples.

Whenever Jesus talked about the impending kingdom of God, the disciples must have dreamed who

was going to fill which position in the cabinet. So the disciples tried to determine the pecking order on the way through Galilee to Capernaum. It seems that they wanted to determine fair and square, by proving who was greatest among themselves. They wanted to see who gets the dibs on the most desired positions.

Maybe the positions were up for grabs. Maybe if one did the lobbying just right, the top positions might fall into their hands. And we see exactly that, when James and John upped the ante, and asked Jesus to have them seated on his right and his left. That must have violated some kind of unspoken code among the disciples, because the rest of the disciples were all seething mad (Mk. 10).

Even with the greatest teacher living with them and leading them, the disciples had to learn things on their own paces, and they could not escape from what everyone else had to struggle

with: their own desire to success and wealth.

It may seem to us trivial, even comical, that the 12 disciples went at length to establish the pecking order among themselves. It all may look silly that they engaged in such a futile exercise as disciples. We look at it from the vantage position in their distant future, knowing what the circumstances were like: Jesus was going to be killed soon, and their dreams would be rendered moot. If we were in their positions, we know we would be doing something more worthwhile than trying to determine the pecking order among ourselves, right?

To the disciples, however, what they saw was all they knew, and they saw only what they wanted to see. They had no clue what it meant to be the disciples of Jesus. They had no idea what the kingdom of God meant to the humanity beyond their own little circle. So they behaved according to the limited vision they harbored. They counted on

the knowledge that there was going to be something big for them, when they arrive at Jerusalem.

Is it really that simple for us to say that we are better and smarter than The Twelve? Are we certain that we would not find ourselves engaged in the pecking order struggle? Are we sure that we would not be competing for career advantages, while following Jesus?

If we are shaking our heads, because of the stupidity and short-sightedness of the disciples in the sunset of Jesus' earthly life, does it mean that we can see clearly what is happening in our own time? What the disciples struggled with in their own little circle is not so different from what we see in our own society and time. People do engage actively and perpetually in the pecking order establishment. People get upset over promotions skipped over. People covet high-paying jobs. People seek favors from influential people. What the disciples did behind Jesus' back

is being repeated all too real in our own time in our own society.

Each generation has its own tasks to fulfill, and its own tuitions to pay. It is almost inescapable that each generation go through the life's folly and failure in its own terms. We are made much wiser, because we had to suffer our own failures and mistakes. That is why we are able to give sound advices and impassioned chastisements to our younger generations. We hope that they would learn and grow to be a wholesome generation, without having to repeat the same mistakes that we have made.

We are trying to teach the younger generation with the hard-won wisdom of our own. Even Apostle Paul advocated thinking like a grownup:

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways (I Cor. 13).

But here is something that is new. Jesus, on the other hand, thought that the disciples could use a lesson from a little child. He took a little child and put it among them, and said:

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

In the course of our zeal and passion for the welfare of our younger generation and our own, have we lost something? Did we have to let go of something, in order to win the bigger and larger things of life?

Why would Jesus show the disciples a little child, when they were concerned about their own greatness? Isn't a little child a perfect antithesis to their concern? What is that which we need to learn from welcoming a little child in Jesus' name? What could the disciples have possibly learned from a little child? What do we need to understand and practice, when Jesus said:

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”?

There are things that we lose on our way of faith journey. We might have lost it while we argued on the way of faith journey. The little children still have it. But we shed it as we grow stronger, older, wiser, and smarter. Then the grownups forget what it was. The grownups even forget that they even had it one time. And in their attempt to teach their young, they encourage them to forget it as soon as possible.

In our attempt to be made great—you may call it the attempt to be successful, famous, or powerful—we make the decision to let go of little things. In such decisions, we betray powerless things. We decide to reject the poor things, and then we justify our action by referring to the theory of survival of the fittest. Even the Fundamentalist Christians subscribe to it, when they are concerned with their own career and success.

In our attempt to be made great, we learn and train ourselves to rule—to be the leader, to be the hero, to be the dominator. And we teach our young how to exploit and take advantage, and to maintain the succession of wealth and power. We even have the precise term for those who are rejected in the course of the way things are: they are known as the collateral damage.

The disciples lost something on their way to Capernaum. They argued among themselves, trying to determine who was the greatest among themselves. Jesus brought their attention to what they lost, so that the disciples could be restored of their humanity.

We might have also lost something on our way to Capernaum—in our faith journey. We might have lost it, while we were arguing among ourselves for the betterment, for the welfare, and for the great things of life.

Maybe we have also learned to steel ourselves for the collateral damage that may have to take place in the course of our action. Maybe we have taught our young that that is the sign of having become a man and a woman—to be a great man and a great woman in the eyes of people—to be able to sustain the collateral damage, and still achieve what a great man and a great woman intended to achieve.

Jesus took a little child and put it among his disciples. Then he took the little child in his arms, and he said to them.