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Gloom and Cheer

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

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Gloom and Cheer

“Gloom” is a melancholy English word that rhymes with “doom,” and conveys the opposite of “cheer” in sound as well as in meaning. Words that we speak to one another, and that we use in prayer, are important means for expressing our thoughts and desires. We also use words interiorly as an almost constant commentary on all that we observe, and also as part of forming judgments for present and future action. If we are not as careful in selecting the words that we use exclusively for ourselves as we are when speaking with others, we might thereby allow gloom rather than cheer to influence our habitual outlook.

Many of us have learned to recognize negative and disruptive self-critical words within us, and not to accept them as our operative truth. All of us are subject to a wide range of thoughts and words that come to mind. But, like opinions, some are based in verifiable experience and others are no truer than someone’s statement that the world is flat, and often arise from fear or anger. If we can deliberately choose not to act on some clearly counter-productive inner words when we notice them, we can expand our practice to more carefully observing, and appropriately choosing, even more words of our inner vocabulary.

Just as we have had to cultivate the practice of taking care to say only what we really believe is appropriate in our conversations or in our prayers, so we have need to develop our habits of managing well our use of interior language. The process of learning to choose carefully our self-directed words is a spiritual endeavor which we can best advance by utilizing spiritual means. We do not usually develop a good habit by simply telling ourselves that we should, for example, get more exercise. Rather, we rely on inspiration, motivation and reasons that appeal personally to us. We move beyond mere thinking, which is primarily mental, to consulting our hearts. God is with us in our hearts, favoring not gloom, but cheer.

Of those verbal expressions that run through our minds as if we were talking to ourselves, which ones have God’s support, and which do not? That question, whether we ask it of ourselves, or whether it represents our intention to observe the effects that our interior words have upon us, can be very helpful. Rather than wondering “What would God think?” which limits the enquiry to a hypothetical thought-exercise, we can pay attention to the experience of gloom or cheer that the words evoke. Of course the distinction might involve other comparatives that are equally revealing about our interior dialogs: our sense of the falsity or truth, the hindrance or helpfulness of the words. God is more interested in our welfare than are we,

and enables us to recognize words that lead us away from our purpose in life and to choose rather those that really support us.

Most of us prefer sunny days to gloomy ones. We can improve our interior verbal "weather" by purposefully omitting gloomy expressions and selecting cheerful ones when we are "talking to ourselves."