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Unattractive

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Unattractive

Some persons, in their appearance or in their actions, are unattractive to us just as are certain foods, store items, and physical environments. Most of us are not drawn to occasions of physical pain or personal loss. There is much in life that we do not like.

We have at last two options when confronted with unattractive persons, events, or things: we can do our best to avoid them, or we can try to be our best in dealing with them. We do not have magical powers to turn an ugly mess on the floor into a work of art, but neither do we have to remain focused on the discomfort we feel as we encounter unattractive realities. We might decide, for example, to consciously draw upon the attractive forces in our lives as one means of moving beyond our first, negative responses.

We do not want to see people suffer; some of the things that persons must endure are surely unattractive. Yet, we are capable of looking beyond physical illness, emotional outbursts, disabilities, and disorders by drawing upon a power that transcends whatever seems ugly. We engage our energies in the attractive option of trying to alleviate suffering, and of bringing consolation and healing rather than turning to avoidance or denial.

God is found in beauty, as in an attractive sunset. But God also attracts us to love those in need, even when our insides squirm at some of the unattractive conditions challenging us. Though we would probably not think about it at the time, we are at our best when we are able to move beyond initial distaste, because of our deeper attraction for what is right and good. Often, we are attracted by the possibilities of helping another person or making a positive contribution in a situation that, at some level of thought and feeling, we find unattractive.

Ignatius of Loyola was not the first to discover this, but put it into print for our benefit: by reflecting and praying with some of those things that we find initially unattractive, we might receive a surprising and welcome insight into a new possibility, an understanding of how a present irritation fits into a larger and positive reality, or a healing of some hurt that has long been with us. Just as we might re-visit a pleasing thought or memory, we can also look again at an interior negative response to seek for another perspective that inspired thinking or careful reflection might provide for us. The attractive power of living more fully our purpose and calling in life opens for us possibilities of much-desired growth by finding life-giving water where previously we might have seen only uninviting dryness.

Not all that is ugly or off-putting deserves further consideration. If we have developed a habitual distaste for selfishness, for discounting other persons, or for acting against our conscience, we bear within us a healthy view about disordered options whose unattractiveness is a benefit to us. One of our God-given capabilities is to distinguish those movements of the heart that identify wrongness from those occurrences that we perceive as merely unattractive.