

Traveling Companion: When the Student is ready...

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I am usually reading three or four books at a time. The one I choose to read at a particular time, depends on the mood I am in. If I am in the mood for something light, I will usually read a novel. If I am in the mood for something heavy, I will bite into a theology book and if I am in the mood to do a bit of reflective reading, I will pick up and read something I can mull over and chew on. Of course, Amazon.com is one of my favorite sites to browse and buy.

When I read, I also use a highlighter to remind me of things that may give me new insights or may end up later in a talk, homily or an article for Gulf Pine Catholic.

When I have read the various books, I copy the highlighted quotes into a computer database that sorts them according to various titles.

Recently, I came across a sentence that captured my imagination. It simply said, "When the student is ready, the teacher will arrive." I spent some time mulling over, chewing on, teasing apart that particular sentence.

We are a very impatient people. We expect instant gratifications, instant solutions to problems, instant answers to questions, instant service to complaints, instant communications with loved ones, instant healings to troublesome worries and crosses. Instant transition through life's growing pains.

How do we know when the student is ready? Is it when they reach the age of reason? Graduate from high school? Graduate from college? Get married? Get their first job? Get their big promotion?

How do we know when the teacher arrives? Is it in kindergarten? The first class period of each school day? Our early lives are filled with teachers, who instill, form, challenge, inspire us but then again, does that mean that the teacher has arrived?

How do we know when the student is ready? Is it not when he or she continues to adopt the posture of learning, of openness, of seeing differently, seeking expansively and breaking open extensively?

How will we recognize the teacher when he or she arrives? Is it not when we recognize that most learning takes place in the classroom of life, that each day brings a new opportunity, a new teachable moment to bring us deeper into the mystery of self, God and life? Is it not when we recognize that there is a time of incubation, leading to a time of transformation and necessary hibernation as the paschal cycle continues? Does not this paschal cycle invite us to descend before we can ascend? Does not our center find us instead of us finding it? Do we not live ourselves into new way of thinking rather than thinking ourselves into new ways of living? Does not the teacher bring a new way of seeing to the student who is ready?

I begin to see the student and teacher at work in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-20). The readiness of the ground determines the yield of the seed. Ground that is clogged by the cares, worries, anxieties of life stunt the full potential growth of the seed. On the other hand, ground that is ready, open, available, receptive produces the most abundant crop.

Perhaps I need to do some cultivation in my own life so that the seed may take proper root and produce abundantly. Perhaps when I am ready to be a student for life, the teacher will come and teach me life.