

The kids will NOT remember this.

“My dog’s bigger than your dog/ my dog’s bigger than yours/ My dogs bigger “cause he eats _____” (Ken-L_ Ration). Bigger. Better

Comparisons.

Or from today’s Gospel: *‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ I’m better. A bigger man.*

Those last two statements aren’t from the reading, but they are certainly implied. I am the bigger, better person. Comparisons.

“Comparisons are odious.” is a famous proverb from 1440CE.

We compare ourselves to others with fair frequency. Comparisons are the barometer by which we judge others and ourselves.

- I am great at sports. Those poor people shouldn’t even be called athletes.
- He makes lots of money. It’s not fair. I’m not making that kind of money.
- Look what I can create with my hands. Their work isn’t nearly as good.
- I have more schooling than she does. They should listen to my ideas more than hers.

Comparisons.

Why do we compare ourselves with others so much? Do we really see them as better or worse than ourselves? What would happen if we believed that all of us have equal worth in God’s eyes?

Think of someone you really love—without bounds and without questions. If you have no person like this in your life—it is fine to use how you feel for a beloved pet. Just think of a person you love—without any comparisons. Got them in your head and heart?

When you think of the ones you love that way, you are not thinking about what they can accomplish, the education they have, whether they have more money than you or not, are you? You love them for THEM, not because of what they can do, or what they are- right?

These people are more than just their names or occupations, right? You don’t think look at them and love them because they are male—or because they are female, do you? Perhaps the person you are thinking of may occasionally get into trouble with you, even bring you grief, but while those things may preoccupy you for a while, you still love them.

You can see that there is a special something inside them that makes them who they are. And we know that it is there *all the time*. When we’re proud of them, when they make us laugh, when we’re upset with them, when they hurt--- that inner glow- that that *specialness* is still there. We can always feel it. The jewel we love without question in our beloved—is that part of God in everyone.

Maybe instead of constantly trying to compare others to us – or we to them—we could learn to find that specialness in each other. That – let’s call it a “jewel” --that doesn’t rely on what a person is or does, whether they hurt us or make us laugh. The part of each person that is always there, glowing—we just need to learn to look for it.

The Chapel of the Good Shepherd in the National Cathedral was my sanctuary while I was in Seminary. One day I sat there telling God about the person I was falling in love with – definitely seeing the jewel in them, you could say.

“You can feel like that about everyone.” I heard.

“What? Like how I feel about the person I’m dating?” I felt amusement.

“A couple of adjustments here and there, but—yes!”

We *can* learn this. We can begin to move our love for the jewel in those we easily love—to other people, even animals. Move it to created things: a tree, the ocean, the planet.

And—if we can—we can try NOT to intellectualize this new way of seeing.

Do you love your beloved intellectually? Do you love your pets intellectually?

Then why love the world that way?

How would our world change if instead of constant competition and comparisons between people, there was instead an openness, a sense of discovery as we tried to discover the jewel of God hidden in all of us?

This kind of effort is the mundane heart of the spiritual search.

Momentous experiences—mountaintop experiences—experiences that take our breath away are lovely and great. But the real work of the spirit—it’s less flashy.

First, we identify parts of ourselves that compare ourselves with others, and we try and let go of the things that separate us: anger, envy, bitterness, greed, comparisons, hate—things that put more darkness into and already overburdened world.

These negative things are like an infestation of termites—they work silently and effectively, until the house we live in won’t be riddled with holes and collapses.

So we need to recognize them when they come to set up house in us, root them out, and replace them with kindness, understanding, and compassion.

If we do it enough, we might finally realize that the things that tear down, will NEVER be the things that build up.

And we are builders—we body of Christ..

We’re the renovators, the fixer-uppers, the reconcilers to help each other.

This is challenging work. Maybe the next time we hear ourselves comparing, we can think of ones we love, and imagine ourselves seeing the jewel instead. It’s not impossible. With a few adjustments here and there— and with wariness for our internal insects—we can see the miracle in everyone. Amen.