



Exploring Benedictine Values

by Jean Glaraton

Featured in *Ministry of Mothers Sharing* monthly e-newsletter

September 2011

“In the face of escalating violence, let us escalate love.” – Jim McGinnis

Courage is a gift as common as fear. In fact, courage is born out of fear. Think of a childhood or family favorite story of courage. We all have one. We collect stories of courage “like treasures from the deep”. “We guard them as part of the collective memory that makes all of us more human.” We view public acts of courage—courage on a grand scale—with a sense of comfort. Reality is that courage exists in far smaller but no less significant ways as well—all of it born in struggle, all of it enkindled by fear. It is when we are most afraid of something that we find courage, spiritual strength that gives direction in the midst of confusion.

Fear, anger, and feeling overwhelmed can paralyze when not dealt with in a healthy way. These emotions are necessary, though not always welcome. Often, they alert us to bad situations that need to be faced and not simply avoided. Courage is awakened when we acknowledge and accept fear as a natural part of life.

It comes in learning a process to work through fear:

- Consider whether the fear you are facing is imaginary or real. If imaginary, or even just exaggerated, talk yourself down from this ‘emotional overkill’. Repeat a calming phrase; *this is not likely to happen and I cannot change it anyway*.
- Do something to distract your mind; pray, breathe deeply, meditate, think of something that brings you joy, do something productive that requires mental energy.
- If the fear is grounded in reality and justified, take action. Speak out, educate yourself on the situation, and learn a new way of responding. Action is the best antidote. Being part of a solution helps you feel more in control. This allows the fear to bring forth the **gift of courage**.

Fear is not the opposite of courage. Fear is the catalyst of courage. – Joan Chittister

Sr. Joan speaks of courage as the **capacity to stand our ground, to speak the truth**, even in the face of overwhelming odds. It is the intention to stay at something, whatever the cost. In the staying, we discover what it is to wrestle the self, the problem, and the pain from the refuge of darkness. We discover what it is to live the struggle within ourselves until it can finally be resolved. Then, because we refused to ignore it, refused to give it away, all the tomorrows of the world will be better. Courage carries people through the average day. It is an attitude, not an action. It speaks up when silence is key to social approval. It comes not in a burst of insight, but out of the way we think and live every day of our lives. Courage is what you do when your heart is ready to be true to your best self.

Courage implies a willingness to be honest with ourselves and others. It requires that we learn to accept our limitations and to live within our boundaries. *We are not everything we would like to be. We are not who we would like to be.* We too often fail to develop and enjoy the gifts we do have because we so much want to be something else. It takes courage not only to stand against the odds with others but to accept the odds against ourselves. Courage is not the lost part of us; it is the hidden part only fear can energize. Just by being honest with yourself, you take a first step into the heart of courage.

Concepts taken from *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* by Joan Chittister and *Marriage Moments and Parenting Pointers* by Susan Vogt

Exploring Benedictine Values (continued)

October 2011

*Inner peace is a great gift of grace.
When we are at peace,
we find the freedom to be ourselves,
even in difficult times.
We let go of what is unnecessary
and embrace what really matters.*

– Joseph Bernardin

Inner peace. Freedom. The ability to let go of the unnecessary and embrace what really matters. These are qualities one finds in a resilient person. These same qualities are also often found in individuals who embrace a Benedictine value system as foundational in their lives. Resilience—the “ability to meet, learn from, and not be crushed by the challenges, stresses, and crisis of contemporary life” (definition by Robert J. Wicks)—can be developed by the very values that shape Benedictines and mold them in becoming the beings God intends them to be.

Consider the value of **Community Living** - knowing that we become who we are by our relationships with others. Resilience may or not have been modeled in our early lives, but it is certainly affected by those we are in relationship with today. Being around resilient people is a gift. Life involves constantly striving to adapt to changes, both welcome and unwelcome. Resilient people have a network of support within their families, their friends, their faith communities and beyond.

Moderation, learning to be content with living simply and finding balance in work, prayer, and leisure, lends itself to a resilient attitude. When we rely less on acquisition of material things and more on our relationships with God and others, we develop a heart which is better equipped to deal with even the most unwelcome challenges. Resilient people understand the need for flexibility as a way of adapting to these changes and challenges, paying attention to ‘the little things’, the details, learning what to look for in people and in situations, and realizing that they cannot control life, but rather adjust and make the most of what life offers.

Finally, resilience is, at its core, striving for **Peace** on all levels: with self, others, and God. Resilient people have learned peace is not external. True peace is found deep within our beings, in our very souls.

*Peace is not something you can force on anything or anyone...
much less upon one's own mind.
It's like trying to quiet the ocean by pressing upon the waves.
Sanity lies in somehow opening to the chaos, allowing anxiety,
moving deeply into the tumult, diving into the waves,
where underneath,
within,
peace simply is.*

– Gerald May

Ministry of Mothers Sharing
An outreach ministry of the Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Paul's Monastery

