

This afternoon/morning, since it's Lent, I have a *confession* to make. In the parlance of "pop-spirituality" there is a phrase that is often used (perhaps over-used) that people really seem to love and accept as sound spiritual wisdom. I on the other hand, I would just as soon this phrase die a quick death so that I could begin to be free of this "spiritual kryptonite" and get on with ministry without having to worry about "cringing" every time hear this advice leave someone's lips. If you're sitting there trying to figure out what this phrase is, let me give you a little help. Why don't you just "let go, and let God?" Yuk.

Certainly God has to be more than a glorified-vocational busdriver or chauffeur. Surely the mysteries of life and the universe are more complicated than letting go of the steering-wheel and asking God to take a turn. I never liked the bumpersticker “God is my co-pilot” either, but at least that has a pinch of reality. “Let go and let God.” Just what are we saying? Better yet, just what are we expecting from God?

One of the reasons I take so much issue with this phrase (in its popular usage) is that it **trivializes** the one thing God desires most of us: our total surrender to Him. It presumes that the apex of human freedom is found in **giving God** the responsibility for my spiritual well being. It treats God as the **spiritual** equivalent of the Calgon bath (if you remember that). Is there really much difference between “Calgon, take me away,” and “Let go, and let God?” Not in our popular understanding, especially if we think of God as just a supernatural ointment for our spiritual ills.

Yet the funny thing is, the readings we have this weekend are about “letting go” as well as “letting God.” However, they run **against** the popular understanding of the phrase, and give us another way to look at “let go and let God;” a way I think is much more challenging and **authentic**, and as such, a way that can salvage this phrase from the spiritual sappiness that sticks to its surface today.

Letting go. One would think that letting go of those things that truly trouble us, that truly disturb and even harm us, that letting go of those would truly be easy. As the phrase suggests, “just let go, giv’em to God, He’ll know what to do with them.” Sounds easy? Should be easy? But it’s not is it? We see a perfect example of this in our gospel with the scribes and the Pharisees and their adherence, their dependence on the law. Their very identities were wrapped up in it. But they held so **tightly** to the law that it was sucking the very life out of them it was supposed to ensure. Jesus came to fulfill the law, to transform it from observance to life in the Spirit. And he constantly invited them to enter into this process, to “let go” of their “stunted” identity and “let God” forge **with** them, a new one.

But they were having no part of it; even when Jesus **exposed** the law's deficiency in front of their very eyes when he said in so many words, "if the law so correct and all-encompassing, then let the first person who is without sin follow the law's command and stone this woman." One would think that **one** of them would stop and say, "Hey Jesus, you know, you got a good point there. Let's talk about this a minute." I'm sure that was Jesus's hope, but instead they walked away clinching the very thing that was poisoning their hearts.

That kind of letting go is hard to do. Like the scribes and Pharisees, there are things in **our** lives that are so unnecessary which we insist on holding on to, that they become **part** of our identity, and thus a safe place to hide from the transformative power of God. Sounds silly doesn't it? But we all do it. We resist change, especially when it comes to altering the world we've built around ourselves and are comfortable living in, even despite its challenges, its shortcomings, and ultimately its falsehood. As T.S. Eliot once said so well, "I don't believe one **grows** older. I think that what happens early on in life, is that at a certain age one stands still and stagnates."

The question before us is, “Are we too, like the Scribes and Pharisees, standing still and stagnate?” And if so, what keeps us from taking a new step, from “letting go” of this ground that does nothing but swallow us up? Perhaps it’s the second half of the phrase, “letting God.” Letting **God** *choose* the direction I should turn in and walk (because He knows better than me where I need to be). That’s a far cry different than “letting God” take the wheel and *chauffeur* me to the Promised Land.

True “letting God” is the heart of St. Peter when he said, “Lord, I will follow you wherever you go.” Little did Peter know that he too, like his master, would be led to the cross, and die the same death. However, in letting God plot that course and following it freely, this meant that thousands upon thousands (and ultimately ourselves) would hear the words of everlasting life and come to know that **death** now meant something totally different. In letting God, Peter freed himself from the forces of evil and the world that would have had him stay put, stagnate and safe in that upper room. Thank him and thank God he stepped out in courage. Today those forces still tell us to stay in our upper rooms. “Letting God” means saying “No” to fear and trepidation, and giving ourselves to the only One who can truly make us free, free to do His will. But that begs the question, “how free do we really want to be?”

Fr. Henri Nouwen summarized this dilemma quite well. He said, “It takes courage to move away from the safe place into the unknown, even when we **know** that the safe place offers *false-safety*, and the unknown promises us a saving intimacy with God. We realize quite well that giving up the familiar and reaching out with open arms towards Him who transcends all our mental grasping and clinging makes us very vulnerable. Somewhere we sense that, although holding on to our illusions might lead to a truncated life, the surrender in love leads to the cross.”

Yes the cross. The cross was the result of Jesus's "letting go and letting God." Why on earth would we choose that? A good question, especially when "Letting go and letting God" was supposed to be an easy cure for our temporal and spiritual ills. The truth is, the only true cure for our temporal and spiritual ills, lies beyond this world. And the cross is the key that unlocks the door to that world beyond ours. Only by embracing it, only by letting go of our need to be in control of what we ultimately can't, can we discover the new life that comes from dying to self.

The cross is scary, because it means an end to the life we know; but the cross is also joyful, because it means the beginning of a new life that is beyond our greatest imagination. For all of us there is the cross that awaits the end of our earthly journey, but along the way there many **other** crosses which offer new life, that we can either choose to accept or avoid. Avoiding them is easy, but not very interesting. I'm certain there is a cross Jesus holds out to you this evening/morning, this Lent, which leads to a death and resurrection. The scribes and Pharisees opted to avoid the cross Jesus offered them. What they missed in doing so, they will never know. But if you're truly interested in knowing, then maybe it's time you truly "let go, and let God."