

Pursuing Spiritual Breakthrough **NEVER Give Up!**

This final precept appears to be self-explanatory. Nevertheless, I believe it would be helpful for us not to take it at face value alone. Though it seems to be an obvious goal, it is sometimes difficult to carry out. We know we should persevere and “never give up”, but in reality it is sometimes easier to simply throw in the towel. The current increase in suicide rates in the US is a clear indication that there is a rise in despondency and depression that is taking hold in our country. And those in the Church are not immune to this curse. But this is not a new trend. For example, there is only one sermon that I remember my rector at St. Thomas preached in Houston. It was a new year’s day sermon and his point was: “Be of good cheer, and never give up.” That was New Year’s Day 1986. It was a timely, maybe even prophetic, word. One month later the Space Shuttle Challenger blew up and our parish was rocked by the disaster. That word is still relevant today. “Be of good cheer, and never give up.”

As we have repeatedly seen in the examination of these precepts, we cannot “get” spiritual breakthrough by our own efforts. Spiritual breakthrough, by definition, will come from the Person of the Holy Spirit living and working in us. But He must have our cooperation. We need to want what He wants. That is the beginning of our breakthrough, setting our will aside and desiring what He wants. Then we need to ask Him for it, make room for it, and receive it when He offers it to us. We must continually pursue spiritual breakthrough and never give up.

What we are talking about here is the virtue of perseverance. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says, “...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...” (12:1-2) Perseverance is not something we can produce in our own power. We must “look to Jesus...the perfecter of our faith.” The preacher in the book of Ecclesiasticus (2:10) reminds us to “consider the ancient generations and see: who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame? Or who ever persevered in the fear of the Lord and was forsaken? Or who ever called upon him and was overlooked?” Things may look dark, and the problems may seem insurmountable, but “who ever persevered in the fear of the Lord and was forsaken?” He will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)

There is a second principle that needs to be considered here. That principle is the importance of maintaining our connection and fidelity to the the Body of Christ. We NEED each other. When I’m low, I need you. And when you are low, you need me. We need to run this race together. Again the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (10:23-25) says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” And St. Paul urges us to “bear one another’s burdens.” (Galatians 6:2)

Let me conclude with a quote from someone who had reason to be discouraged and to give up, but chose faith and perseverance instead. Helen Keller, the early 20th century blind and deaf author and motivator said, “Believe. No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted island, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit.” Look to Jesus, the perfecter of our faith, and never give up! And let us sail together to the fulness of our Lord’s spiritual breakthrough.