

NOTES FOR TALK ON SIMPLICITY

By Becky Thomson

When you hear the word SIMPLICITY, what thoughts come to mind?

- Frugal/Spending less
- Living with Less
- Enjoying the Little Things
- Order/Rules/Organization
- Sacrificing worldly things
- Recycling/Repurposing
- Less Stress
- Less Clutter
- More time
- QUIET

There are lots of resources, books, blogs dedicated to living the simple life. A lot of us probably think about the religious life as being one of simplicity, especially for those who have taken a vow of poverty and obedience to God. These people have given up a lot to live that life, but, what about us who have chosen the vocation of motherhood and marriage? As mothers many of us have this DEEP LONGING and DESIRE for SIMPLICITY IN OUR LIVES and certainly a spouse and children complicate this desire because, well, they are in it ... and we LOVE that they are in it. We really do! We know in our hearts that we are NOT called to live a life for ourselves. Just like those who are called to religious life, we are to live our lives FOR GOD. And, yet how do we do that when there are so many distractions, so many things on our to-do lists and so many people (big and small) needing every bit of our attention.

IN COMES ... THE VIRTUE OF SIMPLICITY!

What I didn't realize when reading up on simplicity this week was that this longing and desire to live for God IS the basic definition of SIMPLICITY and we are ALL called to it! I found some great definitions that I'd like to share with you:

- as a VIRTUE, simplicity means: Being able to align our lives to the one single goal of following God's will. Simplicity is very closely linked to our availability and to the spirit of JOY and the spirit of SACRIFICE.

JOY, SACRIFICE & SIMPLICITY are bound up in putting GOD first

- Fr. John Hardon SJ, in his Modern Catholic Dictionary says as a CHARACTER TRAIT, simplicity is: the quality of not being affected; therefore, unassuming and unpretentious. A simple person is honest, sincere and straightforward. As a supernatural virtue: It seeks only to do the will of God without regard to self-sacrifice or self-advantage. (Now, if that isn't the description of a virtuous mother, I don't know what is!)

What I didn't see in my research, is that leading a SIMPLE LIFE doesn't mean that there won't be any chaos and that life can't be BUSY. It certainly doesn't mean that one should hide under a rock. The busy-ness of life is going to happen regardless, BUT, certainly there are ways (even small ways) to help us as moms LIVE in a way that will help us to do the will of God and in turn, help our children to want to live God's will for them as well! For some of us, that might mean slowing down ... for others, it might mean speeding up!

SO HOW, do we live a SIMPLE LIFE? WHAT DOES SIMPLICITY LOOK LIKE IN ACTION?

The main way to do this I found is to PRACTICE DETACHMENT. (I read several articles that talked about practicing detachment in order to live with simplicity.)

Detachment is an attitude. It's what enables us to throw away notebooks from our college days and give away clothes that don't fit us anymore. It allows us the wisdom to let things go. It allows us to know the difference between Christ's definition of the good life and perhaps Better Homes and Garden's view of the good life. (Not that we can't have good things! We just shouldn't be "attached" to them. Our things shouldn't define us in other words.)

ALSO: Along with detachment, the simple life requires gratitude.

St. Paul urges the Ephesians to: "[Give] thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." And by that, he didn't just mean saying "thank you." He meant appreciating God's gifts in deed as well as in word, caring for everything given and entrusted to us as wise and good stewards.

A SIMPLE PERSON IS:

The simple person is honest, straightforward, and uncomplicated.

A simple person is comfortable and at ease with who they are, and they do not base their identity on their possessions or achievements.

The virtue of simplicity goes hand-in-hand with the virtues of humility and sincerity.

IN ACTION

The simple person may stand out for:

- Her thoughtful way of treating others
- Her sincere joy when he greets a friend
- Her ability to accept the things he has without needing to compare himself or feel superior to others
- How she spontaneously praises others for their qualities, without exaggerating
 - How she deals with God in a respectful, loving way
 - How she rejoices in others' successes and achievements
 - How she doesn't need complicated, expensive things to have fun
- How she does not need to be the center of attention or talk about herself incessantly
 - How she listens to her friends, valuing them for who they are, not for their external achievements
- How she can acknowledge her own victories without being pretentious

IN LIFESTYLE:

Simplicity encourages us to trust more in God than in our personal capabilities.

It allows us to not be attached to our own plans, designs or ambitions.

It allows us to not fear change.

It aids in pastoral charity. If we are choked by possessions, eating, drinking, shopping, etc... we have little time to pour our in service to others

It allows us to be a witness to the world which offers a good example, encourages people to practice selflessness, justice and charity.

It is also a constant reminder that this world is not our permanent abode.

How can we teach simplicity to our children?

As parents, our example is our first lesson to our children. The way we talk, dress, ask pardon when we make a mistake, enjoy the simple things, celebrate others' successes, and avoid criticism are all important.

We can also engage in real teaching moments by showing our children how to enjoy the simple things in life, how to notice and celebrate the beauty of a flower, the scent of fresh-cut grass, the fun of an afternoon bike ride, the taste of home-baked chocolate chip cookies, the sound of rain on the roof...

Some other opportunities to teach simplicity can be:

- Encourage your children to spend time playing in the park or riding bikes instead of surfing the Internet or watching TV.

Get them back in touch with the simple joys of life. Plan fun family outings where they can experience those simple things with you.

- If you make a mistake, don't cover it up or pretend it didn't happen. Instead, simply ask forgiveness—and encourage your children to do the same.
- Show kindness to others by listening to them and respecting them. When they are absent, speak well of them, and encourage your children to be kind in their words as well.

As a mom, I like practical advice. As a child of God, I do appreciate spiritual wisdom as well. So, I thought that if we could perhaps work together here and come up with some "Advice Columns" ONE for the PRACTICAL. And ONE for the SPIRITUAL and come up with ways we can or ways that you already do, practice simplicity. And, I'm thinking short blips here ... 1 sentence things we can do to live simply. First, let's reflect a little bit and you can write down a few that might come to mind, and, then we'll share with the group. No right or wrong answer here ... just brainstorm how we can be more intentional about simplifying our lives in order toTHEN, we can talk to one another at our tables if any of you would like to talk about any of them in more depth.

There is a book called, *LIVING THE SIMPLE LIFE* by Jesuit priest Fr. Emmanuel Gibergues. And in describing *SIMPLICITY*, he goes to a profoundly deep level that I have really been clinging to this week and I wanted to share it:

Men judge us according to the exterior, according to the words that they hear and the actions that they see. This is why they are so often unjust, severe, and ill-natured. But God judges us according to what He sees within; He looks on our heart, our will, our motive, and our intention, and it is according to these that He approves or blames, rewards or punishes.

Such is the meaning of these words in the Gospel: "If thy eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light." But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." The eye signifies the intention, for, just as the eye directs our steps, so does the intention guide the movements of our soul. The intention is the eye of our soul. If our soul looks toward God, if it freely directs toward Him our thoughts, words, and actions, then all that we do, all that we say, and all that we think becomes by this very fact supernatural and good. The Gospel expresses this in saying, "Thy whole body will be full of light."

Thus, the merit of human actions lies wholly in the intention. Our actions have simply the value of our intention.

Therefore, simplicity becomes the *soul of the spiritual life*, since it consists precisely in purity of intention. Simplicity gives to the life of the spirit all its depth and value. The simple soul is ever pleasing to God, because it ever looks toward Him, and seeks for Him always, having no ambition other than to do His will in order to procure His glory.