

RENEW: RECLAIM

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2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer

for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

Paul speaks of an “inner nature” as something that external persecutions, afflictions, and hardships cannot destroy. Paul acknowledges the impact of his external circumstances upon him, but wants to stress that they are not the whole or final story of his life. Indeed, he takes a different perspective on his past, reclaiming his adversity as something that can shine with new significance and “eternal glory”. To do something that matters spiritually means one will encounter hardship. Nothing significant was ever achieved without sacrifice.

Paul stresses that hardships and adversity are not moral failures or the end of the story. What matters is how the “inner nature” grows, learns, and is renewed. Indeed, because of Christ, nothing can ever be just what it is, it can always mean something more, something new. In Christ, death was transformed into life, torture made over into healing, fear imploded into love.

This “inner nature” and “surplus of meaning” is what Christians are called to notice and nurture in ourselves and in others, especially those struggling, hurting, and despairing. In Christ we can write a new story with our lives.

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Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Reflect on 2018.
 - a. What was your most trying or difficult experience of the year? Did you notice God or learn anything from your trial?
 - b. What was one of your greatest joys or achievements? Did you notice God or learn anything from that experience?
3. The new year means many will tackle new goals. What plans do you have or goals did you make for 2019? What about spiritual goals? Consider one thing you might focus on to grow your spirit and relationship with God in this year.
4. What does the “inner-renewal” (4:16) and becoming a “new creation” (5:17) mean to you? How might that perspective shift how you understand and embrace your past or other people?
5. Read the prayer. What sticks out to you? In what way do you feel Christ is challenging or inspiring you through this prayer?

PRAY

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

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