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In the last two years, I have had my car window smashed and briefcase stolen; letters and bill payments blatantly heisted from my local mailbox so my checks could be rewritten and directed to others by the robbers; and my identity stolen so that my bank unknowingly gave my money to another person. It has been a surprising, eye-opening, unsettling time to say the least. It has become a dark day when this kind of behavior is happening across our country in small towns as well as big cities. Department stores like Walgreens are now building into their budgets millions of dollars' worth of anticipated stolen goods. I find myself thinking about these thieves wondering what makes them tick. They have decided to make stealing their profession, robbing others of their hard-earned money so they can avoid getting jobs and meeting the challenges of providing for themselves. "Thou shall not steal" is being lost and ignored by these impoverished souls and numb consciences. These operators in the dark are banking heavily on the fact that God is not watching them or judging their actions.

Following the will of God is not easy for any of us by any means. It requires discipline and tremendous practice. The word discipline comes from the same root word as disciple. The disciples of Jesus were a motley crew of common people who were taught daily for three years how to subject their own wills to the will of God. They were constantly being tested and challenged by Jesus to trust in his commands and follow him wherever he went. Turning our

wills over to the will of God is the ultimate test of our faith. Do we trust God enough to believe that obeying and following him will lead to the most fulfilling and eternal life we will ever find? Jesus never said it would be easy, but he always provided the encouragement and assurances necessary to urge his friends to stay on the right path and trust him. He told his followers, "You can enter God's kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to destruction is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." (Matthew 7:13-14)

I have many good friends and acquaintances who are active members of Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous. I admire them tremendously. They understand the need for discipline and following God's will for their lives in ways I can only wish for the average person attending church these days. To these friends, obeying God's will for their lives is a matter of life or death. Addiction is a nasty foe for someone trying to lead a healthy, fulfilling, and peaceful life. They know what it is to "sweat blood," resist temptation, and lean heavily on the support of their active communities which surround them. None of them achieve sobriety on their own. Some of these friends are members of Bible studies I lead. It is a blessing for me to watch them develop an even closer walk with our Lord during our meetings and discussions; and they bless others in the group who are learning to trust God and follow his will for their lives.

We live in a pleasure-seeking society today. The purpose of life for many now is to have as much fun as possible all the time – with a diminishing regard for our neighbors and others. And if God's will gets in their way they simply choose to ignore it. For example, many people have forgotten that observing the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses. Most people, if you ask them, say they believe in the Ten Commandments as good guard rails for our lives. Yet, Sunday has now become a sports festival time for many Americans. A football stadium has become our new temple or cathedral for worship. And booze and fun have become our new communion. Betting on a game or individual players has become a new method for us to stay alert, interested, and less bothered by our shorter attention spans. Weekly quiet and rest for our souls has become a thing of the past. The Sabbath was intended for worship of God, remembering all his blessings in our lives, and giving thanks for our friends and family. Today, Sunday has become a time to yell, scream, stomp, and eat and drink and not worry about tomorrow. Seeking pleasure and fulfilling our own wills, as opposed to God's will, has become our new "religion". As Jesus said, "Wide is the path to destruction, and many people find it."

The other group of people I admire so much are my Benedictine friends at New Melleray Abbey in Dubuque, Iowa. I retreat with them as a lay person as often as I can. Many people today give monks a hard time thinking they are relics from our past, boring people out of touch with the scintillating entertainment options in our more modern world. But nothing could be further from the truth. These highly disciplined men have turned their wills over to the will of God. They have

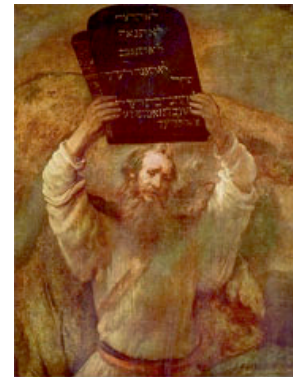
dedicated their lives to praying for you and me and working with their hands at tasks beneficial for their surrounding communities. They don't do whatever they want all day long; they have dedicated their lives to trusting in the rules and order of Saint Benedict which come from the teachings of Jesus.

They are walking through the narrow gate of life, finding rest for their souls, and a hope for their eternal destinies. Trusting in the will of God, believing it is wrong to lie, cheat, or steal takes time; it does not happen overnight. It takes constant practice, falling, getting up, trying again, discipline, mercy, grace, and the support of a believing community around us. A Christian life is a peaceful life as the Apostle Paul reminds us when he wrote the Thessalonians, "Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others." (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)



New Melleray Abbey

Are we losing the sense and value of discipline in our lives today? Are children being disciplined enough by loving parents; are students exercising reverence towards their teachers and coaches, and they towards them; are employees demonstrating respect for their superiors and mentors in a mutually healthy workplace; are our nation's laws being respected, are Christians remembering all that Jesus taught them when they become tempted to follow the desires of their own selfish, pleasure-seeking hearts?



Moses with the 10 Commandments

Jesus, being partially human, knew temptation, too. He was constantly arriving at the same juncture we ourselves face every day – to follow God's will versus our own. I am sure Jesus read the same Book of Proverbs as we still do today when King Solomon said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." (Proverbs 3:5,6)

No one has faced a greater temptation than Jesus when he fell to his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane during the night before his arrest and prayed to God. He was facing the most painful death known to humanity at the time, crucifixion. However, he knew he had to go through with it to atone for the sins of the world. He was willing to sweat blood, follow God's will, for the sake of others and his Lord, but he anguished over doing it.

Scripture tells us, "Jesus walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done not mine.' Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently and was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood." (Luke 22:41-44)

May we follow in the steps of Jesus once again and be willing to sweat drops of blood for the sake of our Lord and the peace of our hearts and world.