

23rd Week in Ordinary Time (Cycle C)

Imagine, if you will, that I've decided to run a marathon. Yes, 26.2 miles. I say "imagine" because there's no way this is going to happen. No, way whatsoever! But imagine with me, if you will, that I've decided to do so.

How would I proceed in this circumstance? Well, first, I'd probably make a visit to the nurse practitioner who serves as my primary care provider. "*Shane,*" I'd say, "*what do you think? What's it going to take for me to run a marathon?*"

I suspect he'd say something like this: "*Dan, your nuts and we have a number of very good psychiatrists here in the Franciscan Network who can help you.*"

"*Well sure,*" I'd respond. "*But here's the thing, Shane. I've made up my mind. I'm really going to do this. So work with me. What's it going to take for me to run a marathon?*"

With enough encouragement, I suspect that Shane – after a certain amount of headshaking – would insist, first, on a comprehensive physical, a check-up to ascertain the state of my health. And then he'd lay out a six-month plan, a six-month plan that would hopefully get me into the best possible shape to run a marathon.

Planning... We do it all the time, don't we? Want to build a house? We make a plan. Want to send a son or daughter to college? We make a plan. Want to retire by the time you're 62 or 65 or 70 perhaps? We make a plan. After all, life is too important to be left to chance, right? Life is too important to be left to the willy nilly of happenstance. As the saying goes, "*if you don't know where you're going, that's probably where you'll end up.*" Yes, if it's important, we make a plan.

Jesus understood this, of course. He was after all – among other things – a carpenter. Want to build a table? You need a diagram, a budget, the right wood, and the right tools. Want to build a table? You need a plan.

Jesus shares his take on planning in today's Gospel reading from Luke. Listen to his words: "*Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation – and finding*

himself unable to finish the work – the onlookers should laugh at him and say ‘this one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’” And he goes on to make the same point about a king preparing for battle.

As I’m sure you know, Jesus isn’t talking about a tower, not really. And he isn’t talking about a battle. No. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is talking about the journey of faith. Jesus is talking about our final judgment – yours and mine – and he’s talking about heaven and hell, something much more consequential, in fact, than the foundation of any building ever built anywhere and something much more important than any battle that’s ever been fought. And Jesus tells us that we need, first, a “check-up” and, then, a “plan.” Yes, when it comes to the journey of faith, we need a plan.

And make no mistake about it. The journey of faith is, indeed, a marathon. It’s the longest race in which any of us will ever compete. Indeed, it extends from the moment of our birth to the moment we take our very last breath. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the journey to eternity – would benefit from an occasional “check-up.” The journey to heaven requires a bit of planning.

So time for a checkup. At the end of your pew, you’ll find a stack of cards. It’s a self-assessment of sorts. Your card – your self-assessment – is for you and for you alone, something for you to take home and think about and pray about, perhaps, over the course of the coming week. Your self-assessment constitutes a check-up that’s comparable, in fact, to the physical my primary healthcare provider would insist upon if I was silly enough to begin preparations for a marathon. Each card lists ten “dimensions,” five on one side and five on the other. All ten are part and parcel of the journey of faith. They’re integral to the meaning of discipleship.

The first five dimensions pertain to your inner life. Yes, there’s a lot going on both here, your head, and here, your heart. Lots of “noise” for most of us. Lots of impediments that stand in our way. The first dimension pertains to trust and reliance on God, the second to prayer, the third to the sacraments, the fourth to faith and the teachings of the Church, and the fifth to discernment. A select set of questions pertaining to each of these dimensions are listed under each heading.

On the back page, you'll find another five dimensions, dimensions six through ten. They don't pertain so much to what's going on in our hearts and in our heads. No, they pertain to how well we live our lives as disciples of Jesus. The first dimension on the back page pertains to charity and love, and the second – number seven – to the way in which we live our lives in community, yes, the way we live our lives with others. Dimension eight pertains to our fundamental identity as witnesses, as missionary-disciples; the ninth to our self-care and wellbeing; and the tenth to the integrity with which we live – or fail to live – our lives as disciples of Jesus.

Again, most things that we hold dear in our lives are worthy of an occasional check-up. Most things that we hold dear in our lives are worthy of a plan. And – as Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms – there is nothing more important to you or to those whom you love than the journey to eternity that began with your birth and with your baptism and that continues to this very moment in time.

And so I encourage you to take one of these self-assessments home with you. And I invite you to spend some time with it. Yes, take it to prayer.

Whether we know it or not, each of us is running – in this very moment – the most important race in which any of us will ever compete: the journey of faith. Taking stock from time to time with respect to where we stand in our journeys can thus represent the most important investment any of us will ever make in ourselves.