



Fr. Matt's Musings

February 17, 2017

*Below is a reflection of my time at the cathedral in Camden.
I hope it helps. Thanks, Fr. Matt*

The Backdoor: Ring the Bell Once, Please

Part of our ministry in the city is to the homeless and drifters. We are located two blocks from the transportation center, so we are a magnet for all who are looking for basic needs. The main entrance to the rectory is from the parking lot which is actually our back door. Constantly during the day and frequently after hours, the bell will ring. More often than not, the visitor will ring the bell more than once. Sometimes the bell will ring in double digits before the ringer will cease, but only for a short time before the routine is repeated. Our response has been to try to gently, in the Salesian tradition, ask that the bell be rung only once. Occasionally, the request has not been as gentle as it might. Those requests have fallen on deaf ears.

Repeated, personal moments of frustration have, at times, led to moments of reflective breakthroughs. The breakthrough came when I changed the experience from my frustration at the number of times the bell was rung to what was happening in this person's life to ring the bell repeatedly. It dawned on me that we have people who come to our door whose daily experience is invisibility and not being heard.

In his section on Meditations in *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis writes, "Consider the nature you have been given. It is the highest in the visible order. It alone is capable of uniting itself eternally with God." (On Creation) Francis reminds us that each of us is unique and unrepeatable. If we are not here, no one can take our place. That is the value we have in God's eyes. Salesian gentleness recognizes and affirms the intrinsic value of each person, created in the image and likeness of God.

No wonder the bell can repeatedly ring. I believe that it is the longing to be heard, recognized and valued. (It still is frustrating to hear the bell ring so often!) Where is the bell in each of our lives? In other words, who are the unnoticed, unrecognized, marginal people longing to be affirmed and reminded of their dignity as a son or daughter of God?

Live Jesus!

Fr. Matt

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