



*Pastor's Pen*

*Aug 11/18, 2019*

- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

## FAME

A radio program played a piece from a disc by a classical violinist referred to only as “A Carmelite Nun.” Neither her baptismal name nor her Religious name was given. Another Religious sister who is well known in sports circles prior to her becoming a cloistered nun asks her family and close friends who receive letters from her to never share what she wrote to them with anyone else. One person who knows her well and is a regular recipient of those letters believes they are incredibly powerful spiritual writing and could benefit others, but she honors Sister’s request.

The reason for the functional anonymity is essentially the same for both. They want no adulation to come to them, but only to God. My guess is that both sisters and their communities also know having notoriety poured on them as individuals poses a serious risk to their humility. It’s hard to be famous. We see daily on internet clickbait more evidence of famous people behaving badly, being arrogant and treating people poorly. And that’s just run of the mill modern secular fame. If you add a religious dimension to it, the risks grow exponentially.

A wise priest once told me matter-of-factly, as we were conversing about a priest who was a gifted speaker with a great conversion story who drew big crowds to his talks, to “Never become a famous priest. The target on your back becomes even bigger.” He was right. A couple of years after that conversation the priest in question was embroiled in scandal, disciplined by his religious community, and said publicly he was leaving the priesthood. (The word is that he has since repented and lives a quiet life with his community.) The incident sent painful ripples through portions of the Church, and I suspect seriously damaged the faith of many people.

Sadly, it likely confirmed what too many people believe is an inherent hypocrisy in religious people, particularly leaders.

This shadow side of the human condition bubbled up this week when a famous Protestant pastor who wrote quality books about the truth of human sexuality announced he was leaving his marriage and “renouncing” his faith. He went from a famous writer and preacher to no longer being Christian. It appears to be a massive leap to me, but it is also not a complete surprise. What made him famous was likely drawing severe criticism. Running into the pains of life that brought trouble to his marriage likely challenged his faith on a personal level. Of course, these things happen to every person of faith, but when they happen to someone in the public eye who is “supposed to have all the answers” the experience reverberates. He was famous. He did important works that challenged the culture and spoke for God. The target that the enemy of human nature placed on his back was bigger than it is for most of us.

His temptation had to be great. I know of no details of the journey he was on, (I suspect some publisher will offer him a lot of money to capitalize on his newfound lack of Christian faith), but the path of any person of faith is fraught with questions, temptation and the risk of the ego growing and God diminishing. When we think about how it is for us, we need to remember how much more difficult it is for someone who is famous.

The sisters who are gifted writers and violinists are in a different situation than someone who is visibly in the public eye who by the nature of what they do cannot remain anonymous. But the principle is the same. Humility is essential to living a coherent and consistent life of discipleship in Christ. As much as we are coached to yearn for fame, it is a burden whether religious or secular. Humility keeps us grounded. Humility is mostly maintained through people in our lives who know us and love us whether what makes us recognized or famous stays or goes.

We may yearn for fame, but it is better to not be famous, as the wise young priest uttered years ago. Lives of simple, honest and humble faith are an easier path to the holiness of life. The target is there but it is smaller. People of fame and inspiration that may help us on our journey should be thanked, but they should also not be put on a pedestal, and they should be prayed for. They may be gifted but the target on their back is bigger. Grounded humility will keep them free in Christ as it keeps us free in Him.