

First a quote from the world heavyweight boxing champion, the Ukrainian Aleksandr Usyk:

“After all he had done and with speculation as to who might be able to challenge him now, how did Usyk find the motivation to keep fighting? “Oh listen here,” he said, as he made a distinction crucial to any clear understanding of his extraordinary achievements in and out of the ring. “I don’t have motivation, I have discipline. Motivation? It’s temporary. Today, for example, you have motivation. But tomorrow you wake up early and you don’t have motivation... When I wake up early for training I never have motivation. I have only discipline. Motivation is good but discipline is better.....” (Guardian 21.7.25)

There’s something here about the formation of good habits. We have to learn to love the Lord and ourselves. It doesn’t come naturally, though in honeymoon periods we might think it does. No, our default position is waywardness, what we might term original sin. But surely this is a Pelagian attitude, a way of reaching heaven or holiness through our own efforts. No, because the one who disciplines us is ultimately God and God does this through the circumstances of our lives, through life itself with all its possibilities of misadventure and its possibilities of correction by those further down the road, those who have already learnt the value of discipline in their own struggle to be good, to live life, that is, in its fullness. The Rule of St. Benedict may sound foreign to us today because of its emphasis on obedience without grumbling, on set times for this or that, on clear boundaries so that we don’t infringe on one another’s duties, on punishments for those who break the rules. There’s even a chapter on how to obey impossible commands which ends with the injunction that, even after his representations, that is the monk’s objections given *“patiently at a suitable time without showing any pride or resistance or contradiction” ... “if the superior remains firm in requiring what he has ordered, let the subject realise that it is better so, and out of charity, trusting in the help of God, let him obey.”* (RB 68) This is to trust another in being wiser than ourselves. This is to trust in a parent figure who knows us better than we know ourselves. This is to trust in a God who *loves* us. And it’s incredibly difficult to do today when it has become obvious that such structures lend themselves readily to abuse. Our trust has been shaken in one another and in the whole concept of tradition, the handing down of truths from one generation to another. It’s almost as if we have to start all over again – that the narrow gate has become narrower. So where do we begin? We begin with the realisation that we are not first in the queue after all, that we are indeed last, that our own pride in our achievements and personalities – all those special gifts that distinguish us from one another – is misplaced. We have to put them down and receive instead the gifts given to us by God in one another – and often in those we consider least among us. This calls for a radical trust in each other as made in God’s image after all. It can only be done one step at a time, one word at a time, one person at a time. It’s a discipline full of the possibility of error. It’s to take the risk of love once again, only to find that God, that Christ, has already been there, is indeed waiting for us in that moment. The gate may look narrow but it’s wide enough for us all. It’s not a matter of motivation, or motivation only, but of duty, the duty or discipline to try.

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