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How many dreams would you say you have each week? Do you remember them? Have you ever awakened from a dream and thought, “What was *that* all about?”

Discover Magazine interviewed a man named Chuck Lamb who found his life’s work in a very strange—even disturbing—dream. One night Lamb, a computer programmer for Nationwide Insurance, dreamed that he was lying on the floor dead, with a detective standing over his body. How would you feel if you had a dream like that? It sounds like a bad television show.

However, Chuck Lamb felt inspired! Maybe this was a new career path for him. So Lamb convinced his wife to take pictures of him in a variety of poses as a dead body. Then he set up a website DeadBodyGuy.com (which is now defunct, just in case you’re searching for it on your phone right now) to advertise his skills to TV and movie directors.

National TV shows like *CNN* and *The Today Show* picked up the story of Chuck Lamb’s website, and he got hired to play a dead body in the TV show “What I Like About You.” Since that first TV appearance, Lamb has appeared as a dead body in numerous TV shows and movies. (1)

I’m pretty impressed with Chuck Lamb’s attitude. I don’t think I’d be so inspired if I dreamed about my own death.

Speaking of weird death stories, last November a French radio station accidentally published a batch of 100 obituaries for famous people who were still alive. Queen Elizabeth II, soccer superstar Pelé, and Clint Eastwood were among the famous folks who woke up to discover their names listed among the prematurely dead. Radio France International blames the mistake on their new computer system. As they moved information from one content management system to a different one, the pre-written, incomplete obituaries somehow got published on the internet, then quickly spread to news organizations around the world.

If we’re being honest, that might be our response too. We like Jesus. His teachings are inspiring. His miracles are exciting. But do we really want Jesus to live in us? Do we really want the responsibility?

I wonder if it’s even possible to speak to this culture, this generation, about self-denial. After all, some of us grew up in the so-called ME generation. “I’ve got to find myself,” we said. “I’ve got to do my own thing. I will buy only the finest, because after all, ‘I’m worth it.’” We place so much emphasis on self: self-satisfaction, on self-actualization, on self-protection. How could Jesus ask us to die to our self? What’s so wrong about putting our self first?

The influence of social media has made our desire for image and wealth and self-gratification even more difficult. There are now businesses that sell fake backdrops to make it appear on your social media site that you are living a luxurious and exciting lifestyle, even if you’re living paycheck to paycheck.

Insults, invective and torrents of verbal and psychological abuse have become frequent forms of communication in our time.

We can see it in the media or perhaps even on the street. Often it is directed at those attempting to stand up for justice or for even daring to challenge public opinion or the status quo. Sometimes it even crosses the line into dark territory — physical violence. What does it take to withstand these assaults? Stubbornness and resolve can help someone to dig in their heels and grit their teeth, but the prophecy from Isaiah points to far more: the ability to do so with serenity and without answering evil and violence in the same way.

The unknown figure in the prophecy had been prepared by God and was not resistant. Similar individuals have a calm and steady assurance that they are in the hands of God regardless of the suffering they might have to endure. They do not experience shame or humiliation at their treatment by others for they know that they are doing the will of God and are pleasing in God's sight.

With that inner assurance, they are quite ready and willing to confront any adversary or threat and to do so without fear or weakness.

Great harm is often done by those motivated by fanaticism, self-righteousness and angry zeal. The individual portrayed in this prophecy is not "inspired" or impelled by his own ego, emotions or desires. The prophet had stilled his own heart and mind so that he was able to respond to the promptings of God's spirit.

Violence and aggressive action are flashier and might appear to obtain quicker results. Ironically, the more profound and long-lasting results are usually from the hands of individuals who did things God's way rather than lapsing into typically human methods. Rage, resentment and moral indignation are not the same as a divine calling. The rightness of one's cause does not equal an anointing from above to use any means to achieve even just ends. In any age, but especially our own, we need to listen more to God and less to emotion, lies and questionable "information." We will all be better off and happier for having done so.

One theological school of thought holds that we are saved only by faith and that deeds account for little or nothing. Another sees our salvation as one big self-help program, enabling us to earn enough points to get into Heaven. Very sensibly, James avoids both extremes.

Faith that does not reach out in loving service to others is not faith at all, but selfishness. And deeds that are not done with love and a sense of service are merely attempts to manipulate God and convince ourselves that we have earned our salvation by right.

Faith and deeds go hand in hand — true faith expresses itself in loving action, and true spiritual deeds are done in faith and love with no intention of gain.

We have heard the story of Peter's confession of faith many times. But it is only partially about Peter — in fact, it is a model or paradigm of how Jesus enters our lives. There are many who are cultural Christians or even regular churchgoers. But mere assent to a creed or dogma does not equal transforming faith.

The apostles had been travelling with Jesus for some time. They had heard His teachings and witnessed His miracles. But to some degree, they were still clueless about who and what Jesus was.

When He asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” they all repeated things they had heard in the marketplace and in the streets. Then the laser-like question targeted each one of them: “Who do you say that I am?”

Only Peter was able to answer that Jesus was the Messiah, the one sent from God. At some point in our own lives, this question will be directed at us in some form. The answer that we give must come from the heart and soul and not from the mouths of others, living or dead. And if we answer that He is the Messiah, then our lives must change irrevocably.

Jesus warns us as He warned them: Following in His footsteps is not easy and can bring suffering and struggle.

God’s spirit will give us the strength and the grace.

Il Fr Desiano

Because I was ordained in 1972, the song used most frequently at the wedding receptions I attended was Billy Joel's, which came out in 1977. I love you just the way you are! "Don't go changing," the song sings, with the idea that the one I love is plenty good enough, even more than I deserve. But isn't the nature of us human's precisely to change? The person I am today will not be the person I am five years from now. Love is tested not a fixed picture but by dynamic growth.

I offer this image as a way to interpret this pivotal moment in Mark's Gospel when Peter professes to Jesus that "You are the Christ." It's hard to know what was in Peter's head because "Christ" could have a variety of meanings, many of them political. But he had his image of Jesus, and he wanted that image fixed, defined, accessible to him.

Jesus realizes that the title "Christ" is not a way for him to be carved forever in marble or made into a golden mosaic icon. He's quite clear in his explanation to Peter. "You say I'm the Christ. Let me tell you what that means. It means I will be rejected, arrested, tortured, and killed. Don't be imposing your fixed categories on me."

This passage is pivotal in Mark's Gospel because in all the times up to this moment Jesus tried to keep people—and even demons—from identifying him. "Do not tell anyone," he repeats again and again. Now that Jesus approaches Jerusalem, that city of destiny, he begins to probe his disciples, the people who have been with him from the start in Galilee: "Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am?" Then he moves on further, "Let me tell you who I am."

Jesus' spirituality was permeated by images from the Jewish Scriptures. He begins his ministry evoking the book of Isaiah, and now the words of Isaiah which we read in the first reading are coming alive in his life. When it is time for me to face my destiny, when it is time for me to give myself totally in love and trust, I will not flinch, I will not turn back, I will not hesitate to show my love. Because only when Jesus gives himself will the fullness of his mission—Resurrection and bestowal of the Spirit—become clear to all.

"Don't go changing," is a tune we often sing to ourselves as we settle into our Catholic and Christian lives, having found a rhythm that suits us, asking only so much of us but not more than we want. Yet our lives cannot be static when Jesus' own life was a dynamic opening of his mission in response to his Father. Although in different ways, God invites us to give ourselves fully to the callings and missions of our lives. God invites us to give all that we have in love.

Of course, God loves us just the way we are. But the way we are, in God's eyes, is not a fixed and closed entity. In God's eyes, we are endowed with gifts and filled with the Spirit to grow every day as disciples of Jesus, to respond ever more deeply to the choices that lie before us. We come to Mass, then, not just as we are but as Jesus' followers, ready to walk alongside him as he gives himself in love as our Messiah, as "the Christ."

III With permission of Fr Joseph Pellegrino

The first reading for today is taken from the second part of the *Book of Isaiah*, sometimes referred to as *Second Isaiah*. I want to point out part of the passage:

The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD helps me; therefore, I have not been confounded; therefore, I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.

Second Isaiah is written for people in exile. The People of Israel suffered because they had been taken away from their homeland by the Babylonians. Yet, they knew that this was God's punishment for their turning to pagan ways. This second part of Isaiah is the *Book of Consolation*. The prophet says that a day will come when the sins of the people will be expiated and God will lead them back home. Today's reading is the third Song of the Suffering Servant. A prophet shall come who will willingly take upon himself the guilt of the people so that he can suffer for them. He is not a masochist. He does not want to suffer, but he does want to sacrifice himself out of love for God and his people.

This same thought is carried in the second part of today's gospel. Jesus, just proclaimed by Peter to be the Messiah, announces that he is ready to sacrifice himself for God's people. He loves deep enough to sacrifice.

This concept is completely against the mind set of Jesus's world, as well as our world. A little sacrifice might be acceptable, but total sacrifice seems unreasonable. That was the reason why Peter protested. And that is also the reason why Jesus tells him that he is giving the argument of the people of the world. He calls him Satan. Peter is doing the work of the devil, the tempter.

A mindset that is basically self-centered cannot understand sacrifice. It also cannot understand love. The person whose concept of love is as a means of his or her fulfilling needs cannot understand that real love demands sacrifice. In fact, the deeper the love, the greater the sacrifice. The shallower the love, the more insignificant the sacrifice.

Couples whose marriages have grown so that they can say that they are far more in love now than when they first married, recognize that they each sacrifice more now than when they were first married. They understand each other better because they are willing to accept each other more than ever before. The lady in our parish whose life revolves around taken care of her sick husband, loves him more now than on their honeymoon. The man in the parish who supports his wife when she is having a bad day, or week, is loving her. On the opposite side, the guy looking to pick up a girl for the evening knows nothing of love. The girl who views a guy as a means to an end will see the end of her ability to enter into a real marriage.

Consider the sacrifices that you make for your children. There is nothing that you would not do for them no matter what it costs you. That includes setting your faces like flint, like the Servant of the first reading, and putting up with your children's complaints and even their anger when you decide that something happening in other homes will not happen in yours. For example, you say to your children, "I don't care what happens in other places, here there will be no phones when we are eating and all devices will be in the kitchen and plugged in for the night by 8:00 pm. If you need them after that for homework, you can do your homework on the kitchen table." You have that rule to protect the children from pornography and from midnight texting. But it results in your children saying, "Everybody else can do this." or you say, "We are a family that puts Christ first. We worship on Sundays and receive communion. If something happens that forces us to miss Sunday morning Mass, then we go to Church Saturday or Sunday night. This is what we do because this is who we are. We are Catholic." And your children respond, "Nobody else has to do what we have to do." But you refuse to back down because you love your children more than yourself and are willing to risk dealing with your own upset at your children's reactions than neglect raising them to be strong Catholics. Your faces are set like flint.

A word to those of you who are senior, senior citizens and to those who are suffering from a chronic and perhaps terminal condition. We are all going to die, but you are getting better at this than the rest of us. Keep your eye on the goal. Don't give up the race in the last sprint. The devil tries to convince us to give up our faith when all is going wrong in our physical lives. We have to keep our faces set like flint and grow stronger in faith every day we have left in this world.

Christ's love for us was unrestricted. He would do anything for us. He would make any sacrifice for us. Peter couldn't understand. He protested because he wanted to put a limit on the Lord's sacrifice, and thus on his love. He thought in the way of the world. It would take time for Peter to learn the demands of Christianity, the demands of true love. He would be among the first of many martyrs who would be witnesses to love.

None of us want to suffer. If we did there would be something wrong with us. But if we really love, then we are willing to accept suffering, and deny ourselves so that our love might grow deeper. Acknowledging that this is completely opposed to the mindset of a self-centered society, we ask God to give us all the ability to love and love well. We ask our Lord to give us the courage to live with sacrificial love, to help us courageously live the Gospel.