NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Simple living: Follow your bliss

Rich Heffern | Jan. 21, 2011 Eco Catholic

My oldest friend Paige was always fascinated by the sea, its lure and lore. When he was a kid, model ships cluttered his room, posters of sail and nautical charts papered the walls. He read every book he could find about sailing and would rhapsodize about this passionate love and his dreams until we his friends got the picture.

The picture looked like this: Paige on the slippery deck of a battered but sturdy sailboat making its way slowly through an agitated sea under a dark, threatening sky. He is busy reefing the sails and securing thick, sodden lines on the deck, making the vessel ready to endure a storm. One arm flung across the sun-cracked paint on the mast, his hands wrapped in the rigging, he surveys the heaving, leaping surface of the sea ahead with steady, glittering eyes.

As happens to us all, adult responsibilities eroded his passion to a hobby. But Paige takes his dreams seriously. One day he ordered plans by mail, rented space in a marina in Oakland, Calif. where he lived, and bought plywood, glue and nails. Then, is his spare time, he built a twenty-six foot cruising trimaran. He named her "Heart of Gold" after a Neil Young song. He could sail only on weekends, but sail he did.

That?s not the end of the story. Today Paige makes his living in ship building and repair. I believe he?s a fortunate man.

?Follow your bliss,? advised the late Joseph Campbell in his famous interviews with Bill Moyers, stressing the importance to the spiritual life of cultivating our unique interests, passions and loves. In what do you most delight? Where is your heart of hearts? To what does your body and soul wholeheartedly want you to go? What keeps you fresh and eager? What makes you most enthusiastic?

Campbell?s bliss happened to be studying world mythology. Yours might be growing orchids, reading good mysteries, quilt making, home schooling your kids, union organizing, mastering the dulcimer and playing in a bluegrass band, ballroom dancing, teaching fourth grade, grassroots political activism, your current ministry, contemplatively walking, fine liturgy, gardening, cooking and eating fiery Cajun dishes ? you name it. You know.

Campbell compared what happens when one follows one?s heart to a favorite image from the Middle Ages, that of the wheel of fortune. ?There?s the hub of the wheel,? he said, ?and there is the revolving rim. If you are attached to the rim, you will be either always above going down or at the bottom coming up. But if you are at the hub, you are in the same place all the time, at the center.?

That center where dwell your enthusiasms and deep gladness is the way our yearning to create finds expression in each and every one of us. Each expression is unique. When we find and poke at it, that touch is like probing a fat, throbbing nerve crammed full of joy and happiness. Channeled though our deepest loves, this urge to create comes from the source of our existence.

Catholic Christianity is a religion of sacrament and incarnation, meaning that the Creator and Sustainer acts in

every human life. ?The reign of God,? Jesus said, ?is within you? (Luke 17:21). Could it be that the divine mystery is with us especially at the level of our unique loves and passions, in those places within us that give birth to enthusiasm? This idea is built into our language, for the word ?enthusiasm? literally means ?God in us.? Divine life is found most surely in our joys and true delights, in the zestful, flavorsome adventure that comes when we follow these passions.

?True prayer,? says Fr. Richard Rohr, ?is finding out who we are in God, finding the spacious place of the soul where we and God most feel at home.? Frequent encounters with deep gladness are a sign you are living fully and fruitfully your creativity.

Cultivating a spirituality for simple living involves locating and exploring those places in our souls that ring like great jubilant wind chimes to the breezes and whispers of the divine.

?By the time may people are 14 or 15,? mused science fiction writer Ray Bradbury, ?they have been divested of their loves, their ancient and intuitive tastes, one by one, until they reach maturity, and there is no fun left, no zest, no gusto, no flavor.?

Is this dictum to follow our heart of hearts just an excuse for self-indulgence? A columnist writes, "We've turned into a nation of piranhas and slobs, and it began when we started thinking that consideration for others isn't important, and doing your own thing is the highest goal of life." He raises a good question. When does bliss-following turn into mere self-indulgence? Perhaps the answer lies in the difference in verbs, between "do" and "follow." To just do your own thing is to exercise and gratify your will at the moment, but following is a long commitment, demanding prudence and discernment. It may take you places you'd rather not go. A passion for justice might, for example, lead to jail time. "Drunk with life," Bradbury describes it, "and not knowing where off to next. But you're on your way before dawn. And the trip? Exactly one-half terror, exactly one-half exhilaration."

Source URL (retrieved on *04/18/2015 - 00:54*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/simple-living-follow-your-bliss