

My Life as a Pinball

At the close of my eighth grade in parochial school I was surprised to learn that I had been selected among some other boys to test for a scholarship at the two private Catholic high schools of the diocese, one run by the Christian Brothers and the other by the Jesuits. I was surprised because I never took school too seriously as other than a place that had a playground for recess antics. Nevertheless I crossed town twice to take the scholarship exam at LaSalle High in a then somewhat suburban location and at St. Joseph's Prep (originating out of St. Joseph's parish founded in 1733). Being that old and also *Jesuit* made it an honor even to cross Saint Joseph's threshold.

I first took the LaSalle test – impressed by its gothic architecture and pleasant neighborhood and later took the St. Joe's test – situated in the noisy inner city. The environment put me off right away but it was the half-eaten hamburger I found in my desk while taking the exam that made me skip the test and catch the trolley. The result? I won a half scholarship to LaSalle – and guess what was the half tuition my parents had to pay back in 1941? Twelve dollars a month!

What would have happened had I gone to St. Joseph's to undergo the influence of the elite Jesuits? I can't even imagine. But it would have taken me far afield from the direction my life took after attending LaSalle. Indeed it wasn't a matter of *what* I would become but *who*. I mean of course we have genetic characteristics that chart our path in many ways but it's the incidents, the turns, the detours, the confrontations, the people we meet once we are launched that bring us to where we *are*. As I look back I am surprised at the meandering, the unexpected, the disappointments, the treasurable people I have encountered – surprised even in retrospect. The same can be said of you.

As people of faith we accept that something more than our reason and choices pulsate our growth – every life is a novel co-authored in some way by a dynamo somewhere beneath our soles (souls). The Hebrew and Christian traditions demonstrate this by the directionless ways its characters chose to advance only to wind up always focused on “a promised land” – each a metaphor of every human experience. What would *you* be and *who* would you be today, if . . .

In today's first reading Amos serves as an example. After all he had settled into being an anonymous, forgettable fellow defined as a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores – when something diverted him to confront the priests of Bethel and wind up - his oracles, his poetry, his insights echoing down the corridors of time forevermore. So that we now know *who* and not just *what* Amos was!

Today's Gospel spells it all out. Hang loose. Travel light. Go with the flow. Food, baggage, money, wardrobe – don't make them a weight that burdens your mental mobility. Don't trivialize your life. If you find hospitality along the way, enjoy it. If you experience rejection, let it go. Just stay open to the oncoming summons that may arrive from where you least expect it. Stay open-minded, openhearted. As the Gospel parables put it: stay awake to the Spirit's lure; don't bury your gift of life simply to keep it intact, unwrapped.

Geoff Wood