



De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

"practical paths to holiness"

"Finding your niche in life"



Ray Kinsella is the main character in the movie "Field of Dreams" (1989) whose world is turned upside down when he hears a voice telling him: "If you build it, he will come."

And build it he does. That, and so much more. But near the end of the film, it is someone else who is asked to join the baseball players beyond the field. Ray is understandably upset, and when he asks the ghost of "Shoeless Joe" Jackson why *he* can't join them, the ghost simply—but firmly responds: "You're not invited."

Imagine how John the Baptist must have felt. As St. Francis de Sales wrote, John spent "twenty-five years in the desert without coming to see Jesus even once. Then, after baptizing Jesus, he does not get to follow him but stays behind to accomplish his appointed task." (Stopp, Selected Letters, page 74)

John wasn't invited to join Jesus. That invitation was extended to others. John's way of following Jesus, as it turned out, was to stay home and to lead others to Jesus. All of us are called to follow Jesus, to live as Christ lived. However, not all of us are called to follow Jesus in the same way. Consider Chapter Nine of Matthew's Gospel. In one scene

(verse 6) Jesus heals a paralytic, telling him to "Pick up your mat and go home." By contrast, when he encounters Matthew (verse 9), Jesus says: "Follow me."

Using the language of the Salesian tradition, while all of us are called to live a devout life, each of us is called to do that in ways that fit the state and stage of life in which God has placed us. In his Introduction to the Devout Life, Francis wrote: "Devotion must be exercised in different ways by the gentleman, the worker, the servant, the prince, the widow, the young girl and the married woman. Not only is this true, but the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, activities and duties of each particular person." (Part One, Chapter 3)

Francis observed: "Among God's servants, some dedicate themselves to serve the sick, others to help the poor, others to spread knowledge of Christian doctrine among children, others to reclaim souls lost and gone astray, others to beautify churches and decorate others, others to restore peace and concord among other people." To be sure, some people are called to follow Jesus by leaving behind all that is familiar. Some people are called to practice devotion by undertaking

some special ministry half a world away. Some people are called to follow Jesus by giving their life for the Gospel. For most of us, however, following Jesus is about staying home. For most of us, following Jesus is about seeing all that is familiar with new eyes. For most of us, practicing devotion is about entering more deeply into our relationships with family, neighbors, co-workers and friends. For most of us, growing in our love for God and others is about lovingly tending to the "fields of dreams" which are the circumstances and events of everyday life.

In that respect the movie "Field of Dreams" is about finding your niche. For one person, it was about forsaking baseball for a career in medicine; for a writer, it was about venturing into the unknown to get the story of a lifetime; for another, it was about growing in his love for his wife, his daughter and the opportunity to be at peace with the spirit of his father.

Francis de Sales wrote: "We must stay in our own ship to make the journey from this life to the next." (Stopp, Selected Letters, p. 251) For each of us, following Jesus is about finding our unique, God-given niche in life...and sticking to it.