

## **One**

### **The Temptation to Fame**

St. John Henry Newman wrote in one of his sermons, “Notoriety, or the making of a noise in the world – it may be called ‘newspaper fame’ – has come to be considered a great good in itself, and a ground of veneration.”

We don’t use the word ‘notoriety,’ or ‘newspaper fame’ anymore. We call it “celebrity.” And Newman is right, we do venerate celebrity. We venerate it almost more than anything else.

As one social commentator put it, most secular people would be more excited if a movie star, sports star, or a rock star showed up in person at their house, than Christians would be if Jesus Himself walked through the doors of their Church on Sunday. And yet Jesus Himself shunned celebrity. He often fled from large crowds and went off by Himself to pray.

There was only one time when He voluntarily accepted the praise of the mob, the anonymous public. Because that one day of anonymous celebrity was enough to show how empty it was.

## **Two**

### **Christ on Palm Sunday**

Palm Sunday was the one day where Jesus let His fans go nuts. He was a one-man parade, people chanted His name, and everybody knew who He was. He was the star. Living the dream. And then, a mere matter of days later, the crowd demanded that He be put to a torturous, shameful death.

Every year, on Palm Sunday, the Church has us relive this wild contrast. We begin Mass by waving our palms and singing a triumphant song of praise and less than an hour later, during the Gospel, we all chant together, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him.”

Could there possibly be a more eloquent witness to the hollowness of fame, the emptiness of having lots of people know who you are?

### **Three**

#### **Almost nothing to many, or almost everything to a few?**

Because we are creatures of sense, we are constantly making the mistake of looking for tangible, quantifiable measures of spiritual realities. We try to come up with tests to measure intelligence, marital compatibility, or even our own personal value.

And one of the tests we try to use to establish our own personal value is asking, “How many people have I impacted? How many people know who I am?”

That’s why we mistakenly value celebrity, because we figure if we have impacted a large number of people, it must mean we are important. But we know that reasoning is flawed. You might as well say a prostitute is more important than a wife and mother because she has a tangible impact on more people. But we know that isn’t true. We know it’s better to be almost everything to just one man than almost nothing to many men. And it’s more important to make a deep impact on just a few people than to have a shallow impact on a lot of people.

### **Four**

#### **Putting your happiness in the hands of strangers**

The great philosopher-theologian Boethius said that when you seek celebrity, popularity, and notoriety, you are in effect putting your happiness in the hands of strangers.

It's a horrible deal. You evaluate yourself based on people who don't know you well enough to form any kind of accurate opinion of you.

It's like trying to measure your weight with a scale you know is totally unreliable. Sometimes the scale says you weigh less than you do. Sometimes the scale says you weigh more than you do. What's the point of stepping on that scale? It's just an exercise in frustration.

The mob couldn't get Jesus right because they didn't know Him. On Palm Sunday, most of them probably thought He was going to be the warrior-king, who delivered them from Roman rule. On Good Friday, most of them probably thought He was a blasphemer, guilty of sacrilege.

Their opinion of Jesus was always wrong and it didn't matter anyway, *again, because they didn't know Him.*

So who knows you? Whose opinion of you actually matters?

## **Five**

### **The people before you**

The people who know you, the people you can't hide your true character from, it's their opinion that matters. That means, mostly, your family. Your spouse and kids. The people you work directly with. They are the ones you are called to serve, to love.

Jesus didn't spend most of His time with crowds. He spent most of His time with just a handful of people. And most of all, God knows who you are. His judgment of who you are is the only one that ultimately matters.

He is the primary One you are called to serve, and love, and spend time with.

The whole world is caught up in celebrity. We spend time reading up on famous people. We spend time posting things, and looking at the metrics, seeing how many views from strangers, how many likes from people we don't live with, and how many comments from people we haven't seen in years.

We sit side-by-side with our family members and look at our phones, our telephones, "tele," which comes from the Greek word for "far away."

Care about those close to you. God is right with you. Always. The people you live with, the people you sit next to and across from. Care about them. Make your life matter. Don't make it a mile wide and an inch deep. Don't seek the show of Palm Sunday. Invest in the small group of people directly in your life. The people who know you.

That's how you transform the world. That's how Christ transformed the world.