

‘Learn to love like God’

A famous Irish comedian always ended his act by saying, “Live each day as if it were your last. And one day you’ll be right!”

Last week I pondered the question of how we die. Today I would like to reflect on how we live.

This question was triggered in me by a quote in an article in America by Jesuit Father George M. Anderson. He quoted Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker, as saying: “Two things we have to learn, not to judge others, and not to mind others judging us.”

How many of us can live with that kind of freedom? It’s easy to get a certain “pleasure” from pointing out the faults of others. It makes us feel better about our own faults. “At least I didn’t do that!” we can say self-righteously. Some people seem to look for ways to be offended: “He didn’t send me a thank-you card!” However, it’s not the way Dorothy lived, nor the way Christ taught us to live.

The flip side of the coin is equally challenging. How many of us can accept being judged and not become defensive, and start explaining ourselves? We’re sure we’re right.

Any time we find ourselves getting defensive, feeling the need to explain or justify ourselves, it’s almost always the human ego speaking, not the spirit of God in us speaking. Our egos like to take offense, to be right, to make others wrong. Jesus, however, showed us the way of forgiveness, compassion, and non-resistance. Remember that scene when the crowd came to throw Jesus off the cliff? The evangelist said that Jesus simply walked through their midst. Jesus lived without an “ego.” He could pass through the eye of a needle or through the midst of a mob.

Two stories come to mind of another man who seemed to have that ability. General Robert E. Lee, the leader of the Confederate Army during the Civil War, was once asked by an aide what he thought of a certain officer. Lee responded with glowing words of praise for this particular individual. The aide responded, “General, how can you speak so well of this man? He never misses an opportunity to run you down, to

“speak ill of you!”

General Lee responded, “I wasn’t asked what he thought of me. I was asked what I thought of him!”

There’s a second, equally revelatory story, about Lee. He was travelling by train with a group of his fellow officers. A poor woman boarded the train at a particular station, and she had to stand since all the seats were taken. General Lee, noticing her plight, immediately stood up and gave his seat to her.

The other officers immediately jumped up to offer their seats to Lee. He responded: “No, Gentlemen. If you couldn’t offer your seat to this poor woman, you can’t offer your seat to me.”

It isn’t easy to live without an ego. To live without a sense of the “little self - the ego,” we have to live with a sense of our Higher Self.

Father Anderson has some further quotes from Dorothy Day: “Woke this morning with a feeling, very strong, I belong to Someone to whom I owe devotion. Recalled early love and that joyous sense of being not my own but of belonging to someone who loved me completely.

“Love is a matter of the will. If you will to love someone and try to serve him as an expression of that love, then you will soon come to feel that love. All of our life is a practice to learn to love like God.”

We can all try to live by the words of her friend, Father John Hugo: “You love God as much as the one you love the least.”