

Being an instrument

Our Founder wrote many times that we should be “Instruments of Mercy” or “Instruments in the hand of God” or other variations on this theme. I thought it might be a good idea to reflect a bit more on what it is to be an instrument.

What is an Instrument?

When we think of being instruments of mercy, we tend to think of a musical instrument but the word has a wider meaning. An instrument is a tool, a means of doing something so it can be e.g.:

- a musical instrument, to make music
- a pen or a brush to draw or paint
- something like a scalpel, to cut with precision
- It can also be a pot or a vessel. St. Paul uses it in this sense in 2 Cor 4:7

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.” The image here which was used for the 2010 General Chapter interprets it in this way and depicts the DMJ as “cracked pots” which let God’s mercy and compassion flow into and out of us.



And what do all these things have in common?

They are made and they are used. They can do nothing on their own. They have a purpose for which they are designed. The quality of the instrument affects the quality of the “job”. There may be other things that you can think of too but let’s start with these.

An instrument is created and used and has no life of its own.

That is true of all creation; it is true for each of us. We are God’s work of art! (Eph 2:10) And as our Founder’s prayer says: “Did you but cease to look on me with love....I would sink back into my very nothingness.”

Put another way “...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19). On school retreats where we used this phrase as part of an exercise, some of the pupils really objected to this particular phrase. What is your reaction? It can be difficult to accept this especially in our western culture where we are encouraged to be strong individuals and where “my rights” are so important but actually there is a great freedom in accepting it.... not that it is easy!

Instruments that we use are inanimate and have no say in their use, although sometimes it feels as if they do. (Don’t computers always play up at the most critical moment?) We, however, have the gift of free-will and we can choose to allow ourselves to be used or not. In a way our whole spiritual journey is about this choosing to be who we are ... becoming more and more who we are. Gerald G. May describes it in terms of willingness and wilfulness:

“Willingness implies a surrendering of one’s self-separateness, an entering into, an immersion in the deepest processes of life itself. It is a realization that one already is a part of some ultimate cosmic process and it is a commitment to participation in that process. In contrast, wilfulness is the setting of oneself apart from the fundamental essence of life in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence. More simply, willingness is saying yes to the mystery of being alive in each moment. Wilfulness is saying no, or perhaps more commonly, ‘yes, but...’”

(Gerald G. May in “Will and Spirit”)

An instrument is designed for a specific use...

... so each of us is designed differently to fit our place in God’s plan. It is no use having a hammer if you want to cut a piece of wood or a thick paintbrush to paint a fine line. Thank God we are all different! Thank God the DMJ have so many “Characters”. That is how we can be a flexible instrument as a Congregation and fit meet different needs. And thank God that these days we can have different apostolates. We are not all meant to be teachers and we are not all

meant to be medics. Some fit well working among the poor and others working in other ways. It is important to be who we are if we are really to be an instrument of mercy. If I try to be something I'm not, I just get in the way.

“The enchanting music produced by a well-trained orchestra is the effect of the exactitude, the perfect unison of the instruments, the performers watching and responding to the slightest gesture of their leader which they obey with such marvellous promptitude as to suggest to the listener that the whole orchestra consists of but one man. Thus should the Daughters of Mary and Joseph work together in perfect harmony and unison, with but one mind, one will.”

Constitutions 1891, p. 133 (72)

We need the violins and the triangle. We need the solo artists and we need the ones who play oom pah pah in the back row and provide the rhythm for the rest of us. It is *together* that we reach out to bring God's life, love and compassion to all people. So we should not compare ourselves with others. If I think I am better, that is pride and if I think I am not as good that is just frustrating and both are ego. Sr. Teresa Clements, my novice mistress, used to correct my critical voice with a gentle “not right, not wrong, just different”.

The quality of the instrument affects the job

What am I trying to say? It is not that anyone is better than anyone else but even a master craftsman can only do so much with poor tools. The quality of the instrument I am depends only on the level of willingness I have. The style of the “job” will reflect my personality. It is not God does it all and certainly not I do it all but God does God's work through me... hopefully! The instrument is necessary for the work and can do nothing alone. The way I am an instrument of Mercy may not be the way you are. The people God can touch through me may be different from the ones you can reach. One can be oneself as an instrument. When I allow myself to be who I am the treasure can shine through.

For Reflection:

Yahweh's Flute

Yahweh stoops to pick me up
I am a flute,
a simple wooden flute
an instrument for him.

Perhaps he will hold me in his hands
and I'll know that he is with me
bestowing on me the gift of his touch.

Perhaps he will softly blow his breath through me
one solitary note
and I will be his instrument,
carrying his voice to my brothers

Perhaps he will play a gentle melody
quiet and sustained
inspiring me to sing of his love
in a subtle and colourful harmony.

Perhaps he will awaken me with a sudden flow of
notes
rising to a climax of silence
at the stillpoint of our union.

Yahweh, I am yours to use.
Will you use me in a solo?

Will you place me with another of your instruments
weaving together to form a song in your name.
or will you set me in the midst of an orchestra of
souls,
where we will each contribute our total selves
in close movement towards a symphony of prayer?

Whatever you will, Yahweh,
may I feel your life-giving breath,
your Holy Spirit, working through me.
May your vibrations of peace and joy,
soar above the wings of morning,
delighting the ears of your people
and turning them face to face with the Lord of
morning.

Blow where you will Yahweh.
Breathe through me.

(Anonymous. If anyone knows who wrote it please
share. It was found, hand-written, in a room on the
West Wickham site in the 1980's)

Annette Lawrence dmj