

Training for Our Choices

Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. I Corinthians 9: 25

“Boobus Americanus” is a term coined by H.L. Mencken (1880-1956) for what he saw as the ignorant, self-righteous, and overly credulous American middle class, people who can easily be manipulated. Nothing much has changed since Mencken’s day. Too many persons are like two young fish who were swimming along. They happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” The two young fish continue on their way, but a few minutes later one of them looks at the other and says, “What’s water?”

There is too little awareness anymore of what is real and essential, of what is both hidden and in plain sight all about us. Mindlessness is the stuff in which our world swims. And mindlessness is not a good environment in which to make choices about our lives.

In a mindlessness world, glitz and glamour are more important than substance. There is no right or wrong, only looking out for Number One. And there is near total avoidance of responsibility as persons abandon duty for that which is fun or profitable. Forget hard, long-term work toward a goal and cooperation for the common good. Everyone does their own thing. Mindlessness takes a toll.

Anthony Bloom was metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church until his death in 2003. He advises in his book, *Beginning to Pray*, that each of us “Settle down in your room at a moment when you have nothing else to do. Say, ‘I am now with myself,’ and just sit with yourself. After an amazingly short time you will most likely feel bored... Why? Because we have so little to offer to our own selves as food for thought, for emotion, and for life. If you watch your life carefully you will discover quite soon that we hardly ever live from within outwards; instead we respond to incitement, to excitement, in other words, we live by reacting to our outer world... We are completely empty, we do not act from within ourselves but accept as our life a life which is actually fed from the outside; we are used to things happening which compel us to do other things.”

Again, Bloom says, “We are used to things happening which compel us to do other things.” What kind of a way is that to make choices? Especially when the things that happen to us are part of a mindless world? Paul says that Christians are like athletes. We have to train for what lies ahead, which includes the necessity to make faithful choices. Whereas athletes are more concerned with the outer life, being a Christian is more concerned with the inner. What is to be brought under control is our too often ignored inner life, inasmuch as it controls our outer life, and we’re to do this as Christians have always done, including the means of prayer, worship, and Bible Study. But remember also that Christianity is not just what we believe. Christianity is a set of practices based upon what we believe. By practicing the faith today, we train for making choices about our lives tomorrow. And by practicing the faith day after day, we train for making choices about our lives whenever and wherever such choices need to be made. – DJ