

# A Very Wise Man

I met a very wise man recently when I stopped by to pick up a friend. He was standing by a make-shift memorial for someone who recently died. I asked if that was where a recent murder had occurred. I told him I thought that was very sad. He nodded and said “people are willing to die for so many things—a pair of shoes, an insult—but what are they willing to live for?” It was only a brief encounter. I didn’t ask his name, but his words will stay with me for a very long time.

Before you start saying “that doesn’t happen in my neighborhood,” think again. Though people you know may not be physically dying, you might be surprised to find how many are empty inside, just going through the motions and not really living. No make-shift shrines of balloons, flowers, and stuffed animals, but sad nonetheless.

No—this is not going to be another encouragement to “smell the roses,” but it is worth taking time, as that unnamed wise man told me, to think about the things you’re willing to let die and those for which you want to live.

Though I’m almost embarrassed to put it in print, one of the things I’m willing now to let die is the illusion I’ve had since my early 20’s that I would make such a difference in a remote part of the world, that there would be a statue in the town square and an annual festival in my honor. As the years go by, I’m realizing that while statues and festivals might be nice, what I really want is to love and be loved. My twin grandsons are teaching me that. And there’s no statue that can ever compete with their smiles and giggles—absolutely nothing.

I’ve always thought it would be easier to die for Christ than to live for him. Quick martyrdom and it’s over. But making the choice to live and love each day as he did is quite another thing. And in a strange paradox, living calls for dying—to my ways, my judgments, my sense of how the world ought to run.

What might happen if each one of us decided to live that way for just a month? What difference would it make? Would we be softer, more generous, less afraid, and more open to differences? Would it be highly contagious like the winter flu? And dare we dream what would happen if politicians and world leaders would give this a try? It may sound foolish, but what if?



Irish poet Padraic Pearse puts it so much better than I could in his poem “The Fool.” It tells of a man who took the challenge of living this way. Here’s a short section of that poem

*...What if the dream come true?  
and if millions unborn shall dwell  
In the house that I shaped in my heart,  
the noble house of my thought?  
Lord, I have staked my soul,  
I have staked the lives of my kin  
On the truth of Thy dreadful word.  
Do not remember my failures,  
But remember this my faith  
And so I speak. Yea, ere my hot youth pass,  
I speak to my people and say:  
Ye shall be foolish as I;  
ye shall scatter, not save;  
Ye shall venture your all,  
est ye lose what is more than all;  
Ye shall call for a miracle,  
taking Christ at His word.  
And for this I will answer,  
O people, answer here and hereafter,  
O people that I have loved,  
shall we not answer together?*

What if, as the wise man I met said, more people decided to live for something?

What if?

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate