
Coach Koehr's Swimming Awards Banquet Talk – March 3, 2017

Gratitude

- **A Friend's Paradox**

- I was talking to a friend at another friend's birthday party
 - The guy was really struggling with his recent divorce and separation from his kids
 - Just a big mess
 - He went to see a psychologist, and he was telling me all about the things he's doing now
 - Exercising
 - Eating Paleo
 - Yoga
 - He said, I'm finally concentrating on myself for a change
 - As we talked, I could see how he was just faking it though
 - He's a friend, I could tell
 - He was looking inward for happiness and he wasn't finding it
- So finally I told him that he was looking in the wrong place
 - If you want to find happiness, you don't look inward
 - You look outward
- It's one of the biggest paradoxes of life
 - The more we concentrate on the good of others, the more happiness we find for ourselves

- **What Makes It Hard?**

- What makes thinking of someone other than ourselves so hard?
 - Most of us **want some sort of recognition** for the good things that we do
 - It's natural
 - But like last Sunday's gospel, it sort of negates some of the real good
 - I can think of this woman in my Darden class who was always making a show of her "service"
 - She publically presented the Dean with a check for service hours to the Business School rather than cash
 - Then she didn't implement any way to track the hours

- Or she made a big scene about collecting money to buy Christmas presents for 12 kids
 - I was left thinking, wow, we do that every year
- The other thing that can make it hard is **when you feel disrespected or unappreciated**
 - It's even harder when you are under stress
 - One antidote is:
 - Try to think of the times when you've wronged someone else before you get upset about being wronged
 - That's harder than it sounds because there's a basic principle of human behavior at play here
 - No one thinks they are wrong
 - Because if they ever did think they were wrong, they'd change their behavior
 - Let's do a little test
 - Think of a time when you have wronged someone else
 - I'll bet not all of you can think of a time, can you
 - And you know that you have!
 - Let's try it a different way
 - Think of a time when someone was angry at you
 - Ah, much easier, right?
 - So the next time you are angry at someone, **take a moment to think of a time when someone was angry at you**
 - **I'll bet it will calm you down**
 - Because you will be better able to think of the situation from a perspective outside yourself
- **What Makes It Easier?**
 - **How can we make thinking of other people first easier?**
 - Let me start with a story about **my mother**
 - My mother was the youngest daughter of Italian immigrants
 - I mean **Ellis Island** immigrants
 - My grandfather came over from Italy **before WWI and mined coal** in Pershing, IA

- Then he **went back to Italy** to fight in WWI so that he could keep his Italian citizenship
- After the war, which he fortunately survived, he **went back** to Pershing
 - Again **leaving his pregnant wife** behind
- After a year, he sent for them
 - So in 1921, my grandmother left Italy
 - **With \$25, an infant and no ability to speak English**
 - She made it all the way to **Pershing, IA**
 - Think about that for a second
 - No internet, no credit cards, no cell phones
 - And people in our country today can't move from East Baltimore to West Baltimore to give their family a better a life
- They lived in a **tar paper house** with **no indoor plumbing**
 - My grandparents had **six kids**
 - The oldest, my Aunt Clerice was born in Italy
 - Then five more
 - My mother was the baby
- My grandfather **worked 6 days a week** in the mines
 - **My mother remembers climbing a tree** that hung over the table where her father and the other miners would play poker and drink homemade wine on Sundays after Church
- When my mother was about six (6), her father and one of her brothers were **crushed in a mining accident**
 - She had **one brother die in an industrial accident** when a beam fell on him
 - She had **another brother die of diphtheria**
 - Ever heard of anyone dying of diphtheria?
 - Ever had a DPT shot?
 - No such thing for them
- When my mother was 13, **her mother died**
 - There was no welfare, Aid to Dependent Children, Social Security, Medicaid, Snap cards (i.e. Food Stamps)
 - **There was just family – and the Church**
- She moved to Chicago with her 2nd oldest sister, my Aunt Anne

- That was **the first time in her life that she had indoor plumbing**
- At age 13!
- She went to a Catholic school in Chicago called Immaculata High School that had opened in 1921 and closed in 1981
 - When she wasn't at school she worked at a **“greasy spoon”**
- Somehow, this orphan girl ended up at **Marquette University** on a **Navy scholarship** and became a **Navy nurse**
 - She **cooked and cleaned** in the boys dorms to support herself
- She ultimately graduated from Nursing School and became a Naval Officer
 - **A Naval Officer!**
- Then, one day she was working at the hospital with another young Naval officer who was having one of his kidney's taken out
 - He was a **poor kid from St. Louis** who paid his own way through college and joined the Navy through OCS in 1959
- They were married and had four boys
 - I'm the oldest
- In the **next 25 years**, my mother's life **could not have been any different**
 - Through years of steady excellence, my father became the first Oceanographer and Meteorologist to ever be promoted to Flag rank
 - Two of their boys went to **Notre Dame** on NROTC scholarships and two went to the **Naval Academy**
 - All of them became Naval officers except me
 - I broke my neck in a rugby game
 - Today they have kids who are
 - An Entrepreneur and Swimming Coach
 - A Managing Director of ASME on Park Avenue in NYC
 - A PhD scientist who designs Navy ships for NAVSEA
 - A Navy Captain F-18 pilot
- It is what some of us still call the **American Dream**

- **An orphaned immigrant girl becomes the wife of an Admiral**
- As a result, **my mother is full of** one very important thing that makes it easy for her – or any of us – to think of other people before ourselves
 - **Gratitude**
- **Think about the good in your own situation for a moment**
 - Think about how well you chose your parents
 - Or your spouse
 - Think about the house you live in
 - Think about the school you are (or were) privileged to attend
 - Think about the opportunities you have in life
 - Like the chance to swim on the Seton swim team
 - Think about the fact that you live in the USA
 - Think about your dreams
 - **You have dreams**
 - To go to college
 - To have a family or vocation
 - To do something great in the world
- **Not everyone in the world has the luxury of dreams**
 - I know **some of you are having some tough times** in your lives right now
 - And some of the rest of us just whine because we think we have it tough sometimes
 - But **think about it**
 - Even if you are facing some real challenges right now
 - And especially if you are not
 - **We all have it pretty good**
 - It kills me to quote a Michigan coach, but I love this
 - Jim Harbaugh is famous for saying, **“Who’s got it better than us? Nobody!”**
- Let’s add to all this our **Catholic Faith**
 - We believe that God sent his son to become man and open the gates of heaven to us
 - We actually believe that suffering can purify our souls and bring us closer to that unity with God himself
 - And we are grumpy?
 - Do we actually believe what we say we believe?
 - The last thing the world needs is another dour Catholic

- But there are plenty of them around
- Including all of us at one time or another

- So **how can we reorient our lives** away from our own struggles and towards the service of others?
 - **Start with gratitude**
- Because **who's got it better than us?**
 - **Nobody**