

A different kind of bucket list

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What's still unfinished in your life?

Well, there's always a lot that's unfinished in everyone's life. Nothing is ever really finished. Our lives, it seems, are simply interrupted by our dying. Most of us don't complete our lives, we just run out of time. So, consciously or unconsciously, we make a bucket list of things we still want to see, do, and finish before we die.

What do we still want to do? A number of things probably immediately come to the fore: We want to see our children grow up. We want to see our daughter's wedding. We want to see our grandchildren. We want to finish this last work of art, of writing, of building. We want to see our 80th birthday. We want to reconcile with our family.

Beyond these, more important things, we generally have another list of things we were too busy, preoccupied, or economically disadvantaged to do earlier in life: We want to walk the Camino, travel to the Holy Land, see the historical sites of Europe, back-pack through parts of Asia, travel the country with our grandkids, enjoy our retirement.

But in fantasizing about what's unfinished in our lives there's the danger of missing out on the richness of what's actually going on in our lives and our real task in the moment. The better question is: How do I want to live now so as to be ready to die when it's my time?

In a wonderful little book on contemplation, *Biography of Silence*, Spanish author, Pablo d'Ors, stares his mortality in the face and decides that this is what he wants to do in face of the inalienable fact that he's one day to die.

Here is his bucket list: *"I have decided to stand up and open my eyes. I have decided to eat and drink in moderation, to sleep as necessary, to write only what contributes toward improving those who read me, to abstain from greed, and never compare myself to others. I have also decided to water my plants and care for an animal. I will visit the sick, I will converse with the lonely, and I will not let much time go by before playing with a child. In the same manner, I have decided to recite my prayers every day, to bow several times before the things I consider sacred, to celebrate the Eucharist, to listen to the Word, to break bread and share the wine, to give peace, to sing in unison. And to go for walks, which I find essential. And to light the fire, which is also essential. And to shop without hurry, to greet my neighbours even when I do not like seeing their faces, to subscribe to a newspaper, to regularly call my friends and siblings on the phone. And to take excursions, swim in the sea at least once a year, and to read only good books,*

or reread those that I have liked. ... I will live for those things according to an ethics of attention and care. And this is how I will arrive at a happy old age, when I will contemplate, humble and proud at the same time, the small but grand orchard that I have cultivated. Life as cult, culture, and cultivation."

Life as a cult, culture, and cultivation: I'm a two-time cancer survivor. When first diagnosed with cancer, the prognosis was good. I had a scare, but time still stretched out endlessly before me. But when the cancer returned in 2018, the doctors were less optimistic and told me, in unequivocal terms, that my time was probably short, no more endless days. That prognosis clarified my thoughts and feelings as nothing ever before. Stunned, I went home, sat down in prayer, and then wrote this mini-creed for myself, with a different kind of bucket list:

I am going to strive to be as productive as long as I can.

I am going to make every day and every activity as precious and enjoyable as possible.

I am going to strive to be as gracious, warm, and charitable as possible.

I am going to strive to be as healthy as long as I can.

I am going to strive to accept others' love in a deeper way than I have up to now.

I am going to strive to live a more-fully "reconciled" life. No room for past hurts anymore.

I am going to strive to keep my sense of humour intact.

I am going to strive to be as courageous and brave as I can.

I am going to strive, always, to never look on what I am losing, but rather to look at how wonderful and full my life has been and is.

And, I am going to, daily, lay all of this at God's feet through prayer.

Not incidentally, since then I have also begun to water plants, care for a feral cat, and feed all the neighbourhood birds. Life as cult, culture, and cultivation.

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