

About 15 years ago I am owned a little home for about nine months. It was a little rambler – simple little home. A few months in, I was terribly restless as I was thinking about my vocation and the possibility of entering the seminary.

After months of going back and forth, I finally mustered up the courage and called the realtor. He was a little taken back I wanted to sell it less than a year after purchasing it. However, once I told him that I was thinking about entering the seminary, he understood.

Secretly, I hoped it wouldn't sell. Sure enough, someone came along and gave me a great offer in like a week. I was really struggling at the closing. It was hard to let go of the house. I remember the people buying it from me said, "Thank you for selling us your house. We can't believe how clean it is for such a young guy living in it." They then asked, "We heard you might be going into the seminary?" "Yes, thinking about it," I said in kind of a sad way.

After signing the papers, I went to the elevator and made my way to the car. As soon as I got in my car, before putting the keys to go, I broke down and started crying. I wondered if I had made the right decision. It was hard to let go. And it's hard to let go of security, what you know and move into the unknown. Letting go – a willingness to allow God to lead you – it's certainly the great theme for the readings this weekend.

A man says to Jesus, *"I will follow you wherever you go."* And our Lord says in response, *"Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

Normally, Jesus approaches others, but in this case, this man approaches Jesus. His commitment is strong. He will follow Jesus "wherever" He goes. Jesus, however, offers "nowhere." He has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, the man desires good. He wants to follow Jesus. However, is he willing to give up his home, life's comforts, and the risk of following Jesus into the unfamiliar?

It is a question for disciples in every age. In our spiritual tradition, many of the saints speak about detachment, the freedom from excessive affection for any created good. Because we are fallen, many times we give our hearts too much – or we overinvest – in something in this world as if it can give us ultimate happiness.

One of the saints who spoke so well of detachment was St. John the Cross, a Carmelite. St. Therese, our patron saint, read St. John of the Cross and was formed by his writings.

St. John joined the Carmelites in 1563 and desired to become a contemplative. However, he soon became dissatisfied with the worldliness of the order. Shortly thereafter, he met St. Theresa of Avila who asked him to help reform the Carmelites by returning to a life of prayer.

She was 52 and he was in his late twenties when they first met. Unfortunately, John and Teresa were met with misunderstanding, and persecution.

In fact, John's own order kidnapped and locked him in a cell six feet by ten feet where monks beat him every Friday. There was only one window high up near the ceiling. It was in in this unbearably dark, cold, and desolate cell that his faith and love were ignited. They would not allow him to offer the holy Mass. They used psychological tortured on him.

And in that tiny little cell, God brought John the greatest joys. In that little cell, St. John gave us some of the greatest spiritual works on tradition – Ascent of Mount and Dark Night of the Soul. And he gave us beautiful reflections on detachment – a healthy relationship to the world's goods – material things, honor, fame, pleasure – so that we can remain free to serve God with our whole heart.

For St. John, we are a like birds and when free, we soar – we live beautiful lives of service. However, attachments are like a string or a large rope that hold a bird in bondage. The prohibit the bird from what it is supposed to do – fly.

Practically, speaking, how do you know if you have attachments, and more importantly, what do you do when you are attached to something or someone?

I have a few litmus tests. First, pay attention to how much you think about something or how much energy you put into obtaining something. The time you spend thinking about something – I am thinking about money, move higher in a company, buying a new electronic – the greater indication there is some form of attachment there. Attachments, of course, come in degrees.

Second, pay attention to how you react when you don't get something you really want, or lose something you have. Oftentimes, the emotion is very strong. On the other hand, there can be sadness when you lose something, but it is never crushing. I read a book containing all the St. Zelig Martin (mother of St. Therese's) to her family members – Call to Deeper Love. In her letters, I was struck at how often she said, "Well, this is hard, but we are not made for this world." She really understood we were pilgrims. She had a healthy form of detachment.

How do you break an attachment? Certainly, and I don't say this lightly, pray against it. Be honest about it, and ask the Lord to break it. We need spiritual help. Additionally, some form of self-denial is critical. I have an attachment to chocolate. On Fridays that are non-feast days, I try to skip desert. Find ways to strengthen your will. If you can't say no, then your yes doesn't mean all that much. Finally, this may seem silly, but tell yourself, "This is nice, but I am not made for this. It's not everything. Lord, you are my all." Goal: Keep God at the center - then you are truly free!