

Is there any such thing as fidelity?

In a culture where change is swift and common, in a world where movement is global and given, in a society where three careers and two marriages are commonplace, the very notion of fidelity stretches us to the outside edge of meaning. Is there really any such thing as fidelity now? And why?

We think of the questions as new ones, bred out of a culture of social change and limitless options, but it doesn't take much reflection to realize that change, more than anything else perhaps, makes for the very essence of the spiritual life. The soul only grows as a result of the changes that tax and test our tolerance for the present, ability to find God where God is rather than where we think God should be for us. Change of mind, change of heart, change of hopes, change of insights require us over and over again to sort through all the pseudo-certainties of our lives, keeping some things, altering others, discarding the rest of the notions that were once its convictions, its absolutes, the very staples of our souls. The question of fidelity to what and why, the clamorous questions that crowd in constantly for attention, follow at the heels of every other.

Fidelity does not lie in refusing to change. Permanence is not a synonym for constancy. Fidelity lies in making whatever changes are necessary to bring us from the ideals out of which we have always operated in order to achieve those ideals toward which we have always striven. Fidelity manifests the truest part of us in process to the whole of us. Coming to wholeness by being faithful to the self and the inspiring ideals we steer by means that we will never make fidelity our excuse not to become what we must most be.

But if real fidelity requires steadfast commitment to those values which direct and define us, which lie at the core of the soul like a lodestone, which transcend all others and measure our authenticity then what is philosophically obvious begins to ring with a more ominous tone." If the Church itself should become an obstacle to our salvation," Thomas Aquinas writes, "we would be required to leave the Church." That is the essence of fidelity, to be willing to forego anything that makes the best in us impossible. To make perpetual that which is not worthy of eternal pursuit and everlasting preservation is not a virtue. It is a shocking concept, this notion that fidelity does not lie in standing in place but in consistently moving toward whatever brings us to more and more wholeness of heart, certainty of soul, clarity of mind and integrity of behaviour until we finally know deep in our deepest selves what stars really guide us. Fidelity is the ability to move freely through life because of the unwavering ideals that call us on from wherever we are to where we must be if we are ever to achieve and maintain those ideals at all. Fidelity is not the state of never making a mistake. Fidelity is the state of never staying in one.

—from *The Fire in These Ashes*, by Joan Chittister (Sheed and Ward)

