

Living the Mission Episode 2: The Loveliest Moment in Life with Andrew Cera

Delaney [00:00:05] Welcome to Living the Mission with the Center for Service and Social Action. I'm Delaney Burns.

Caroline [00:00:09] And I'm Caroline Maltese Pull up your Adirondack chair.

Delaney [00:00:13] Or grab your favorite snack from the tureen.

Caroline [00:00:14] And come chat with us and some friends about experiences that have shaped our values to promote social change.

Both [00:00:19] And Live the Mission..

Caroline [00:00:24] Hey, Delaney.

Delaney [00:00:25] Hi, Caroline.

Caroline [00:00:26] What's going on?

Delaney [00:00:28] Nothing too exciting. You know, just another day. Everything's kind of been a little mundane, but there's some exciting things, again, on the horizon, still working things out. Today was good we're having some good conversations, some hard conversations and learning and growing. So I'm always excited and appreciative about that. How are you doing?

Caroline [00:00:48] We're chillin. Overall, doing well.

Delaney [00:00:50] You know what? We're doing our best.

Caroline [00:00:52] We're totally doing our best.

Delaney [00:00:53] OK. Let's see, what are we gonna be talking about today?

Caroline [00:00:56] All right. So I believe that we are talking about consciousness of self and this value in terms of the social change model of leadership is under the individual category. So still talking about how we can grow as individual leaders. Technically, you know, in terms of the social change model, consciousness of self is an awareness of the beliefs, values, attitudes and emotions that motivate one to take action. It has to do with knowing our own backgrounds so that we can move forward to lead, serve and grow in the most effective and efficient way. So we're really excited about our guest today. Who are we bringing on today.

Delaney [00:01:32] We are bringing on Andrew and.

Caroline [00:01:35] And we love Andrew.

Delaney [00:01:36] Yeah, we've only known him for a short time, but in the time we have known him, he has been just a great listener to us and he has helped us, you know, grow so much already with our spirituality and with the learning about how to be conscious of who we are. So we have just been overall impressed by how observant he is and how open he is to the John Carroll

community. Just really looking at what's around him and being aware of that. And we are excited to talk to him. You know, again, just about that consciousness of self and how he is just able to be aware of his beliefs and values and emotions. So we've got a good episode in store for you today.

Caroline [00:02:20] This one's a good one. And you guys are gonna want to keep listening.

Delaney [00:02:23] Let's do it.

Caroline [00:02:23] Let's go get him.

Caroline [00:02:30] Hello, Andrew.

Andrew [00:02:31] Hello.

Delaney [00:02:31] Hi Andrew.

Andrew [00:02:32] Hey Delaney, Hey Caroline. Well, it's great to be here.

Caroline [00:02:35] Nice to have you. How are you doing today?

Andrew [00:02:36] I'm doing well, thank you. This is really, this is my first time ever on a podcast, so I am super excited. Thanks.

Delaney [00:02:44] Of course. So we are just going to start off. We're just going to ask you to give a little introduction about yourself.

[00:02:51] Sure. So my name is Andrew. I am a Jesuit scholastic, which means I'm a Jesuit, but not yet a priest. And so I'm in formation studies for the priesthood. And part of that formation is that I teach for a couple years and so that's why I'm here at John Carroll University. I am, I teach Ignatian spirituality in the Theology and Religious Studies Department. And I also teach Spiritual Direction in for the ISI Ignatian Spirituality Institute. Immediately before this, I was at Fordham University in New York studying philosophy and Christian spirituality. And then before I entered the Jesuits, I practiced law for a few years and I'm from Milwaukee originally. I have two brothers and two sisters, all younger and eight nieces and nephews under eight years old. Nine is on the way. So I'm super excited about that. So, yeah,.

Caroline [00:03:46] Awesome. Thank you. So we've been asking all of our guests this question. You know, with this year not being in person, I don't know if you've had the opportunity to visit the in between, but if you have. We would like to know what your favorite snack is. And if you have not maybe just a favorite snack in general.

Andrew [00:04:04] Sure. So I acknowledge this is a huge gap in my resume. I have not been to the tween. I've been hearing all about it. And so I have not yet experienced the joy of the tween. But I love tea. And so I usually just love drinking tea and chatting with people. So white tea in particular, green tea, if there's no white is usually my go to. So yeah.

Caroline [00:04:26] I'm a big tea fan too. Yeah.

Delaney [00:04:28] We recommend the tender basket in the tweet.

Caroline [00:04:30] Oh I love it. The tender basket.

Andrew [00:04:35] You don't even know where the tween is, exactly. Should I say this online?

Caroline [00:04:39] Exposed! New title, Exposing Andrew!

Andrew [00:04:49] Oh the shame!

Delaney [00:04:49] All right. So we are going to jump in to our topic for today, consciousness of self. So our first question that we want to talk to you about is, why do you believe that it is important to practice the value of consciousness of self.

Andrew [00:05:03] Yeah, well, this question, it very much resonates, I think, with the Ignatian spirituality and stuff that I do and live. And I just love just the definition of the social model that you all have been working with, mainly because there's three words that really kind of stuck out to me. So aware, emotion, and take action are the three that I have. And it's very much. We could almost say it's living the discerning life is what Ignatius would say. And it's very much this idea of being aware of your ordinary, everyday experience, like what is stirring in my heart throughout the day. All of these emotions, thoughts, feelings, you know, fear, joy, anxiety, hope, peace, all of these things that we all experience throughout the day, just being aware of those. And then the second step kind of understanding where they're going, where they're leading, and saying, you know what, I really find a lot of life when I'm with, say I'm sitting in a freshman biology class and I say, well, this is really giving me a lot of joy. And then to think, well, what does this mean? Reflect on that and say maybe I should become a biology major or maybe I should think about going to medical school. And so letting letting those being aware of those emotions, letting that inform kind of where you're going. And then take action and where you're feeling that life to accept it and to take action where you're feeling maybe dryness and spirit dryness in your heart to let that go. And same thing with friends. You could say, like, why do I always feel really dry when I'm with the same people every Saturday night, become aware of that and say maybe I should be doing something else on Saturday night than hanging out with these people, find new friends to go to a football game.

Caroline [00:06:51] So what do you think? You just talked about the importance of it. What do you think would be the result if we you know, ignore that, cast all of those things that you were talking about aside?

Andrew [00:07:02] Mm hmm. So, you know, I'm talking to a Jesuit many years ago, and he said that an experience is only half an experience, if not reflected on. And I think in a life is only half a life if not reflected on. And, you know, as Ignatius says, can we live with our eyes? Can I live with my eyes open just a little and naturally become aware of all the beauty and goodness that's around us? And I love, you know, Caryl Houselander said one never knows from the loveliest moment of life is striking. And I love that being living with eyes open allows me to at least see this is a lovely moment of life that's happening. It could be just seeing somebody waving to them on campus or really just being in class, but being aware and noticing just those little ordinary movements in the heart, in the mind and being grateful for those that all of them comes back to gratitude.

Delaney [00:08:01] We wanted to ask to along with that, do you feel like there's a point in your life that you have seen this be stronger or you've practiced this especially well?

Andrew [00:08:10] Well, I think since I've become a Jesuit I've been becoming more I don't want to say an expert, but I've been practicing it a lot more. And it is encouraging because you really do see you just become more aware of yourself throughout the day. When I woke up this morning, how did I feel when I was having lunch how did I feel? I feel when I was talking to somebody today what was stirring in my in my thoughts and my emotions. And then what does that mean? And to reflect on those and to say, OK, what does this mean for my life? How does this help me become more of myself? How does this make me become fully alive? And I think just becoming just getting into that rhythm of examination has been very helpful. But I think we I mean, we all do it. I think I certainly did it before I became a Jesuit. That's how I think I got to be a Jesuit when I was like oh, maybe I should be doing something else right now. And that's kind of what I love. I was in law school and I mean, I practiced law for a few years and I loved it. But I became more and more aware there was something else stirring within me. And then a good Jesuit said, well how about what about the Jesuits? And I said oh. And then you can feel that little that little touch of the heart. And I said, oh, maybe I should look into this and it's beautiful. And now I get to sit here with you all, and chat and tea, which makes my life very happy.

Caroline [00:09:32] So maybe, Delaney, you are a little bit more, you know, keen to practicing the reflection in the morning and in the evening and throughout points of the day, whereas um that's been a little bit more challenging for me in points in my life. And maybe you as well in points in your life and you're just, you know, pretty good practicing it right now. But are there any tips that you have for someone like me who is maybe, you know, not in tune with reflecting throughout the day. Any strategies that you have?

Andrew [00:10:01] Yeah. I mean, I would say, you know, there's no there's no, like, right way to do it. And so I know Ignatius lays out for us, you know, five steps of an exam starting out with with gratitude and kind of reviewing the day, kind of like a movie and just kind of seeing where those movements were throughout the day. High points, low points any areas of strong emotion. But I always like just the power of silence, even for a minute. And I love the image of, you know, doctors or nurses or any medical professional. What do they do when they when they listen to somebody's heartbeat? There's always a great stillness in the room and they're listening for, you know, what's on the heart and what is what is in the breath. And so just to maybe even a minute of silence, two minutes of silence to to say what's happening, to listen to what's happening in my heart. And the more I found that I'm able to listen to what's happening in my heart, the more I feel I could better listen to the experience of what other people are going through in their own hearts, I think. And so it's very much this idea of listening to become more of a person to serve. I think. But the power of silence. Everything else flows from a moment of silence. I would say.

Caroline [00:11:19] That's hard for me. That's not something that comes naturally. I find silence difficult. But that is helpful. Maybe, you know, a minute here and there, that can never hurt. And the more you practice it, I feel like the easier it will get.

Andrew [00:11:34] Or even like on a run, sometimes I'll just run and do an examen. And it's just that's a time where I know could I know I can be silent at least as best I can. I'm just gonna listen to what's happening throughout the day.

Caroline [00:11:45] That's a good way to, like, ease into it as well, doing the things that you normally would be doing, but doing them more intentionally.

Delaney [00:11:51] Yeah. And I like the image of a doctor, you know, listening to a heartbeat. I think that gives us a good picture and a good image for something to go off of. I think sometimes we see silence as something that is going to be irritable or we're not going to enjoy and people are uncomfortable with it. But I think that we really do have to have that in order to bring some meaning to things and to stop for a minute. And obviously, they have to do that in order to gain something. And I think we do as well.

Caroline [00:12:18] I think I might throw a little bonus question in here. So talking about consciousness of self in terms of leadership. How do you think that, and this ties into sort of the next question we're gonna ask, but how do you think that being conscious of ourselves makes us better leaders?

Andrew [00:12:34] Mm hmm. Well, I mean, any growth and self-knowledge makes us, I think, better leaders. But more so perhaps it's, so, the previous superior general of the Jesuits, Adolfo Nicolas, said we have to resist this globalization of superficiality. And I think becoming a person conscious of themselves, of what is stirring in their own hearts, they become people of depth. I, I can just feel it in my own life, becoming a person of greater and greater depth in whatever I'm doing in in study or in prayer or in service or in work. There's a greater intentionality, a greater depth, because I'm giving more of myself in the process, because I know more of who I am and I know more of what is striking within me. And that helps me just be able to better serve here, better relate to other people. So that's probably how I would answer that question.

Delaney [00:13:32] I also have a bonus question.

Caroline [00:13:33] Oh, this is so exciting.

Andrew [00:13:35] I'm getting nervous here!

Delaney [00:13:38] So, you're talking about these different ways that we can kind of be silent and, you know, to put in the work so that we can be better leaders and take action. And I guess my question, I can resonate with some of the benefits that it brings, but I know that it's hard and it sometimes seems like, you know, there's not a lot of fruit coming from it or it's, you know, not instantaneous. So what do you think are some of the benefits, again, with with doing this? And how do you see it moving within yourself for students and things like that?

Andrew [00:14:07] Mm hmm. I would say, you know, it's not necessarily and I tell my Ignatian Spirituality classes all the time because, you know, prayer can be boring and dry and nobody can say what's happening. But it's not about performance. It's about encounter. And I think it's about encountering yourself, encountering the other. And sometimes that feels like nothing and sometimes it feels like nothing is happening. But then you wake up one day and the leaves have turned orange and you're like, oh, when did this happen? But it's kind of this. You're cultivating an interior sense of silence that then feeds into speech and action and everything else, you know, God's initial voice with silence and I think everything then is created from that. So kind of tap into that great reserve even if you don't feel it. And I don't feel it all the time either. But it's knowing sometimes just showing up and sitting there and even though it's like getting a suntan, you show up to the beach, you don't necessarily know what's happening. And then you wake up the next

morning and you're all red you say, how did this happen? You were out in the sun and you were or you were cultivating a sense of silence. So it can be imperceptible sometimes, but the fruits will come in due time.

Caroline [00:15:19] So then, you know, taking this conversation back to our goals of this podcast to talk about living the John Carroll mission, how do you see this value of consciousness of self relating to the John Carroll mission?

Andrew [00:15:33] Yeah, again, I think I would go back to just the point about depth, becoming people of depth and not superficiality, becoming people who are really able to bring meaningful thoughts and an imagination. And that all takes time, you know, just cultivated imagination. At the spur of the moment, G.K. Chesterton said you can't grow a beard in a moment of passion. And I think..certainly you guys can't and I know I can't get to it!

Andrew [00:16:00] It doesn't just happen, has to be cultivated. Then it's in that waiting and in the patience, in the struggle that the depth happens. And it's scary and it can be uncertain. But it I think ultimately you find yourself doing things like how did I get out here in the middle of the ocean? But you did it because you were faithful to kind of the small things, the awareness of the ordinary, everyday experience of what's stirring in my heart. What are the emotions? Where are they leading? Then what am I going to do about them? And hopefully we should become, you know, people, men and women for others. But I think even further, Ignatius would say we're not just men and women for others, we are made for others our very nature is to be in relationship with others and to go out in service. And so I think we become more ourselves when we're in relation to other people. So it's like the reflective self becomes the relational self. And that then relates to God into the mystical self almost. So it's all kind of comes back to what's happening in my own in my own self and relating that to other people.

Caroline [00:17:04] That's amazing. That's awesome. Well, thank you so much, Andrew, for joining us today.

Andrew [00:17:11] It was my great honor. I am so happy to be here.

Delaney [00:17:13] So happy to have you.

Caroline [00:17:16] Yeah. We really appreciate all the insights that you bring. I think a lot of students will benefit from talking about growing in the struggle and embracing the struggle and learning to truly sit down and reflect through those hard times and to hopefully come out on the other side of it as a stronger, well-rounded and fruitful individual.

Andrew [00:17:36] The only way out is through is one of my good friends have recently said that.

Caroline [00:17:40] We're all experiencing that right now. Yeah. Well, thank you, Andrew. We appreciate it.

Andrew [00:17:47] Thank you, this was fun.

Delaney [00:17:50] Thank you for gathering with us here on Living the Mission.

Caroline [00:17:53] We hope that you continue to journey with us as we learn how to be socially responsible members of our community.

Delaney [00:17:59] In the meantime, connect with USSA on all your favorite platform,.

Caroline [00:18:02] Instagram,.

Delaney [00:18:03] Twitter,.

Caroline [00:18:03] Facebook.

Both [00:18:05] See you next time.