

Last week I saw an editorial in The Wall Street Journal by Warren Kozak entitled, “Dad, Did You Achieve All Your Life Goals?” That was the question Kozak’s 21 year-old daughter asked him at dinner one night. Kozak is 68, and the question stopped him in his tracks, and set him thinking. But it made me stop and think as well.

Jesus tells His Disciples, “be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.” What does it mean to be vigilant and ready for Jesus to come? What would that vigilance look like concretely? How might we check ourselves on that?

That’s where I believe Kozak’s editorial fits in. Kozak’s experience of surprise and need for reflection at his daughter’s question gets at Jesus’ point in the Gospel. There is the danger in our busy human lives of forgetting where we’re going, that our life is supposed to be about something. In worldly terms this can take the form of getting caught up

in the day-to-day grind and forgetting our dreams and goals. Then something happens that shocks us into remembering – like a daughter’s question out of the blue. Jesus makes the same point about forgetting the even bigger question of Life’s ultimate meaning and goal . . . until suddenly the Master returns.

But Kozak’s question has an even more literal application to the Gospel. Our lifegoals and Life’s true goal aren’t unrelated. When I thought about that question, “Have you achieved all your life’s goals,” the question challenged me in two ways: what were my goals, and, then, how well had I achieved those goals?

First, what were my goals way back then? What was I thinking about when I was in college? If my memory serves me, my goals at 21 were what Kozak calls “professional.” As I mentioned a few weeks back, I wanted to get a doctorate in history, then get a professorship at a good university, then maybe write a famous, or at least well-respected, book. That’s about as far as it went. I wasn’t a believer, so I had no

spiritual goals. I don't even remember any personal improvement or character goals, or any plans of marriage or being a Father.

What about you? Did Kozak's daughter's question catch you by surprise – or make you think? I bring this up in light of Jesus' words to keep vigilant, because one way to check on whether I am keeping vigilant in serving Jesus well – and am ready for His return (my judgement), is to examine if I'm working on my life goals – if, that is, I've set the correct goals!

Kozak' realized his goals had changed over the course of his life. He had begun as a young man with professional goals – fame, professional success, money. But his daughter's question forced him to examine his current life goals – and he realized what he was most proud of – and it had nothing to do with what he had wanted at 21. At 68 his greatest accomplishments were: being a faithful husband, accompanying his wife through the two years of her fatal bout with cancer, being a good father and loyal friend.

Maybe our goals need to change, as well. I don't know if Kozak is religious, but his experience resonated with me. My goals had also changed. And my reversion to the Catholic Church is largely responsible for that. Our faith teaches us that the only ultimate tragedy in life is not to become a saint. That goal gets to the point Jesus wants to make about being prepared for the Master's return.

But being ready for Jesus' coming is not only a matter of having the right goals. It's also a matter of, then, actually achieving the proper goals one sets. And that takes consistency over time. When I think of the vigilance of the good servant that Jesus speaks of as it's applied to a human life, it's not only a matter of wishing, or having the right goals. It's a matter of consistent application of the virtues towards those ends. Going back to Kozak's life-long accomplishments, it's takes consistent effort to remain a faithful spouse, a good parent, a loyal friend. One must first watch oneself – and that is the way to remain watchful for Jesus. When we speak of the Christian virtues of faith and

charity, the same consistency is required over the years if one is to become that saint – that person Jesus wants us to be.

So, if I want to see how I measure up to Jesus' challenging words in the Gospel, the pondering of my life's goals is a good place to start. For those of you who are closer to the age of Kozak's daughter – just starting out in life – are your life goals more professional, personal, or spiritual? Is Jesus anywhere to be found in them? Is He the one ultimate goal?

For those of us closer to 68, we can ask additional questions. Have our life goals matured since college? How? Do they center on becoming a saint – a radically committed Disciple of Jesus and person of heroic virtue? Are my life goals even prioritized to the correct end - God? Or do they remain largely professional?

Kozak's daughter's question ("Dad, did you achieve your life goals?") seems to assume that by age 68 you're so old you've either achieved your goals or you've failed. But 68 seems younger and

younger to me. There's still time. We're each a work in progress, at best saints-in-the-making. I know I'm not done yet. I'll be working on Life's one true Goal until I die. But the Master is going to come to each of us at an hour we don't expect. And Jesus clearly expects something from His servants. What goals will He find us working on when He walks through our door?