Drinking the Kool-Aid of success

By Chaplain Norbert Karava

On the very first day of school it began, if not sooner with our well-meaning but perhaps at times misguided parents: Most of us began not only to learn the skills and acquire the knowledge that were the target of our academic curriculum, but we also began to imbibe the motivations given to us for undertaking the arduous path of education (I would rather have been fishing with my buddies at the time). Some of these motivations were obvious, for example, pleasing our parents who positively and negatively motivated us to achieve the goals specified in our curriculum, of course with the appropriate quantifiable results aka the report card, while others were more subtle and often hidden. One of these subtler motives in my education was "success." -- The reason you are here is that you can be a success. What "success" ultimately meant, as something beyond getting A's and making the cut on the football team was never really that clear, although what became abundantly clear was that even at a very early age, the world made a stark distinction between successful and unsuccessful people. Even though being successful was not always synonymous with being a "winner," being unsuccessful on the other hand almost always meant being a "loser." It was very clear that certain schools and even certain classes were loser-designated, while the best and brightest belonged elsewhere. And thus, it happens, I think, that many children imbibe an implicitly fear-based motivation for their "success" to wit, the fear of ever becoming a loser, and then carry this implicit fear-based motivation as baggage, or rather a millstone around their necks, for much, if not the rest of their lives.

Having this in mind, let us consider how it happens, curiously enough, that many people overcome the most daunting of challenges, the harshest trials and tribulations and cruelest misfortunes, only to find themselves, in the end, done in by their own success. Solomon and his countless concubines, Hollywood superstars having achieved the pinnacle of fame and celebrity, only to end their lives in addiction and suicide, world champion boxers eeking out their remaining days in skanky bars, skid rows and ending them in some obscure alley … our history and experience are littered with innumerable examples of life-ships wrecked in the treacherous waters of Cape Success, not far from Your Dreams Come True Here Island. And, as any practitioner of care for broken and forlorn souls will tell you, for every single highly visible case of a high-flyer going down in the flames of his own success, there are numerous others whose demise is externally undetectable, the stuff of "manageable" addictions, loneliness, bitterness, and emptiness, whose measure is in proportion to the greatness of their success.

So, what is it about success that makes it so potentially lethal to the human spirit? All the popular meanings of success, I opine, have a common dipartite theme: The first part of success occurs when we overcome the external forces that would force us to expend life-resources on things that we would rather not. This is the dimension of "freedom from." And so, if we win the lottery we no longer have to tolerate the obnoxious pointy-haired boss or the evil Catbert, director of human resources and waste a lifetime in a degrading mental hospital known as "the office." It can happen that a man can spend a lifetime achieving "freedom from," that he has been clever and lucky enough to achieve a status in which he seems to be beholden to no one and in need of no thing, only to discover that there is nothing he really wanted, only a litany of things that he did not. After having achieved "freedom from," he discovers that he no longer has a reason to live, discovering that living simply to be "free from" is not a reason to live in the first place. He is left with a sticking-out, going nowhere, intolerable self that must be held at bay by any number of distractions, ranging from collecting every DVD ever marketed, to the rush of the latest thrill sports to drowning in a chemically induced stupor. Hence, even on the level of "freedom from," success is a very dangerous place to be.

The second part of success is for those who actually desire something. Having achieved "freedom from," they now have "freedom to," i.e., having successfully overcome the external forces that would force them to devote life-resources to things they would rather not, they are free to devote themselves to things that they would. Having hacked through the jungle of "freedom from," these people actually can make choices in the full sense of the word. Many people, it seems, never make these choices clearly, and linger in the world of "freedom from" but for those who do, these choices are truly defining moments; we become what we choose and are identified by it. This is the stuff of ambition, and achieving these sorts of purposes usually takes a lifetime.

History gives us the example of many people who on the level of "freedom to" have actually achieved their goals, and thus, enjoy success in the full, popular meaning of the word, namely "getting what you want." However, the empty eyes and tired faces often seen in our glitzy 1st world venues of "success" tell the story: "Is that all there is?" "We've tried everything and are left with a dissipated boredom, easily irritated by anything." The experience, I believe, was most perfectly captured by Albrecht Durer's brooding engraving "Melancholia" in 1514, a sincere recapitulation of the great "success" of the Renaissance. Unlike the children of "freedom from" success, who are all dressed up and have nowhere to go, the children of "freedom to" success are all dressed up and not happy with where it is they've gone. And yes, it is too late to start over. But why do you complain? The world was your oyster! You got what wanted! You "won!" You're the "successful" one!

The truth that a life might have been wasted in pursuit of a mirage is so abhorrent to the children of "freedom-to" success, usually and ironically the brightest, most talented and shining ones, that the temptation to live out a make-believe happiness can be irresistible. They remember their days of struggle, when they contended for "freedom from" success – that ironically, they were happier then, than now, sated with the fat of the slaughtered calf of their own crowning success.

Our ponderings on success bring us to the question: "Does getting what you want bring about the state of happiness?" Prompted by Christianity, I answer: It doesn't, and it would be better that you didn't get what you want, and that it would even be better that you spent your life struggling for "freedom-to" success, as illusory as that might be, a struggle that would at least keep you from consummate selfishness… unless what you wanted was love, which always meant having life only to give it away. The only success that the agenda of life supports always was love. What didn't you understand?

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"We should give a shout out to the student counsel," said Lee. "They put on a whole week of fabulous homecoming activities and the planning was absolutely super and their two sponsors, Miss Cheytoria Hickey and Foster Jones did a fabulous job helping to guide them, giving them the structure they need to put on something like that and this parade really was the culmination and it showed what they could do."

Leading up to the weekend parade and football game, students worked to get their school through the homecoming experience by participating in 'Spirit Week' activities, which were geared toward enhancing school spirit amongst each respective class from freshman to senior.

The activities held during the week prior to the parade were Pajama Day, Hawaiian Day, Twins Day and Spirit Day, a pep rally, which was followed by the homecoming dance.

"All the grade-levels did a really fabulous job," said Lee. "They decorated the halls and had their homecoming dance over at Yokosuka Middle School. We had a solid turnout of students and it was just something special for them to do. Each day there was something fun and exciting going on throughout the week. I just thought they did a real, traditional American homecoming. That is what I like about being here at Kinnick. There are so many things that we do here that are so much a part of our own American heritage and to have that here I really like that."

As a part of the parade, each grade level had a float designed to represent their respective class, and anyone who was a student of the school could walk with them during the festivities. Upon the completion of the parade, students, family members and friends then had the opportunity to watch Kinnick's victory on the gridiron against visiting Seoul American High, which further solidified the homecoming experience.

Senior Homecoming king and running back Quinton Holden had 110 yards on 14 carries, including a 28-yard touchdown run. Senior team captain and middle linebacker Alexander Banks finished the game with 15 tackles, including 2 for losses.

"To win on this, my final Homecoming at the moment feels like everything in the world to me," said Banks. "It really brought my spirits up and only encouraged me more to try to play further and further onto college and to see how far I can go with it."

Many of his teammates shared the same sentiment.

"It was exhilarating," said senior offensive lineman Samuel MacSwain. "That is probably the best way to describe how I feel now. The whole week has been challenging to participate in activities between the classes to see who has the most spirit, and finally today, to see so many people come to support us makes this much more special to me."

The football team was not the only group celebrating a victory at homecoming. The Kinnick cross-country track team recently came out victorious over Kanto Plain schools.

"Today is special because our boys and girls cross-country teams are the Kanto League Champions for Japan," said Junior Elicia Daring, Kinnick cross-country team member. "We both took first place this week at Tama Hills and I feel really accomplished because of the all the hard work we put in and it paid off in the end and I feel really good about my team."

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"As Commissioner of the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, I will devote myself to developing Fire & Emergency Services activities in Japan and, I will promote the interchange with the United States Armed Forces," continued Okazaki.

CNRJ Regional Fire Chief Russell Tarver also expressed his enthusiasm for the event.

"This friendship dinner gives the regional, community and base emergency response branch personnel a unique opportunity to come together in one setting and share ideas on how we can better support each other through joint drills and training, and I believe the benefits of this collaboration can be seen by our improved disaster response capabilities," said Tarver.

The dinner also provided Tarver and the Regional Fire Department an opportunity to thank the Tokyo, Yokohama and other district branches for their continued support to U.S. installations in the region.

"Without the support of our regional Japanese counterparts we wouldn't be as prepared to combat emergency situations. It's really great to have the opportunity to come together and solidify this vital partnership," said Tarver.

The dinner's guest speaker, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Japan and Navy Region Japan Rear Adm. Dan Cloyd, expressed his gratitude for the services emergency response professionals provide to both on and off installation communities all over Japan.

"What you all share, and what I humbly and respectfully believe makes all of you so very special, is your close teamwork and your shared passion for what you do - which is save precious lives," Cloyd said in a speech to the attendees. "Through your combined efforts, and superb teamwork, the Fire and Emergency Services organizations both on base and off, are much better prepared to combat any unfortunate emergency or disaster that may happen," he concluded.

Kinnick Sports

Week of Sept. 14 - 20

Volleyball

Oct. 16	CAJ at Kinnick	5 p.m.

Tennis

Oct. 16	ISSH at kinnick	5 p.m.

Football

Oct. 16	ISSH at Kinnick	5 p.m.