

Dcn. Jerry's Homily, 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 17, 2021

Are we there yet? I remember thinking this when I was a kid sitting in the back of our Checker Marathon. Our Checker was brown, eventually rust brown. My dad did not like station wagons and avoided them as long as he could. With seven kids, the Checker was a good alternative because it had jump seats. Something tells me those seats that folded flat and had no belts or support would not pass today's safety standards. And because no one was allowed in the front seat other than my mother, someone got to sit on the metal Thermos cooler that was placed between the two jump seats. It was not a good time to ask questions like, "Are we there yet?"

Years later when we were driving our kids in various vans over the years, the question of are we there yet would come up frequently. Whether the question is spoken out loud or just rattles around in our brain, the question of are we there yet is a sign of our impatience, our desire to get to the end of the journey rather than enjoy the trip.

James and John in today's Gospel suffer from a similar shortcoming. They not only want to get to the kingdom, but each of them is looking for a preferred position. They want power not just a seat in the kingdom.

Today's first reading, from the Suffering Servant section of the Book of Isaiah, could have been written by an eye witness at the Crucifixion. I have said that with several readings this summer, but it is good to remember that God intentionally sent his Son to rescue us from our sin and that his son, Jesus Christ, willingly accepted such a cruel death to save us from our sin. And God told us, through the prophets, that this was going to happen.

Fr. John has frequently mentioned *The Chosen* series on the life of Christ. The series so far has largely gone through the early public ministry of Christ. It has shown itself to be faithful to Scripture, but one of things that I find very appealing is what is referred to as *lectio divina*. There will be a homily or parable or miracle or encounter that is as described in the Gospels, but there is also the reflection, the study, the question of why did Christ do this. What happened before or after etc.

Lectio divina, the study of the Divine Word, helps to reflect on possibilities and is, therefore, not definitive. But to the extent that it helps us relate to the individuals and to God, it is a useful tool. For me, the question that keeps coming up in the episodes of *The Chosen* is the biblical version of "Are we there yet?" Whether Raomi is asking the Blessed Virgin what it was like to give birth to the Christ, or Peter encouraging Jesus to set up an org chart, or Matthew wondering why Jesus did not wait a few hours until after the Sabbath to cure someone in a way that would not have created a problem with the Pharisees, or James and John as in today's Gospel looking for the best seat at the table and special honors, the characters exhibit a certain impatience to get to the answers and not to work in God's time.

I love these depictions because it shows the humanity and impatience of the disciples. Are we there yet? Jesus is trying to teach us that the journey is the there. Just like his journey, the *Via Dolorosa*, the way of grief, we are here to witness. Not everything will be difficult. Not everything will be painful. In fact, the smiles of children, the sunrise, the love of a spouse...there are many, many joys and wonders on the journey. We can take consolation in God's peace. But there is also the cross, our cross.

In hindsight we often miss the moments on the journey when we are too focused on whether we are there yet. Those car rides on vacations should have been filled with stories and family history and imagination about what happened here or there or might happen in the future.

Similarly, on our journey through life why not pause and think what is it that God wants me to do for that person I meet. Is it a kind word and a smile or do I need to stop and listen? Do they need prayer or healing? Can I carry my cross and serve with a smile?

Sometimes we learn the most important lessons in the simplest ways. Last week after one of the school Masses one of the servers wanted to practice carrying the cross. He was not the biggest server and he was not the smallest server. He was at a size and age where he wanted to practice carrying our cross, carrying his cross as a way to serve.

The cross was just about the right size to be a burden for him. And he gladly accepted that burden. He just wanted to practice to make sure he could do it right. He processed through an empty church, placed the cross on the stand and then proceeded to lift the cross off the stand. As we walked to the back of the church, he said one of the most profound faith-filled things I have ever heard. He said that the other week he had gone to confession before Mass and when he lifted the cross it was twenty times lighter than normal.

The cross was twenty times lighter when we turn our sins over to Jesus. The cross is twenty times lighter when we receive the sacraments.

Imagine if we went through life, not asking are we there yet, but instead prayerfully giving our burden to Jesus. Imagine if we joyfully accepted our cross. Imagine if we lightened our load with the sacraments and by spreading the Good News to others. Imagine if we accepted the burden of others and realized that act lightened our load.

Then we would come to the realization. Then we would stop asking are we there yet. Then we would realize that God is here and we are in his peace. If we are with Christ on our journey, if we joyfully take up our cross, then we will not be anxious or distracted by whether we are there yet because we will be awed by the presence of God.

~Dcn. Jerry