

6 December 2009

As many of you know, I have traveled to India a few times, and those trips have been a great experience. Sometimes people will ask me what's it like there. And although there is a lot I could say on this subject, I am going to tell you about just one of my first impressions when I first got there coming from the viewpoint of an American. But in all honesty, one of the most noticeable difference that immediately struck me when I arrived there, were the roads. And you might find this kind of surprising, because this isn't something that people typically think about. But when you do stop to think about it, traveling along a road is a part of daily life. We are always coming and going somewhere. We get very used to what is familiar to us, and when we see a change, it captures our attention. And there definitely was a big change going to India for the first time. Because in India, especially in the countryside, there is a lot more going on in the road that you don't see in the United States. In the United States you mostly just see motor vehicles in the road, but in India, you see things like bulls pulling carts and other people and animals walking along in addition to lots of people riding their bikes. In the countryside of India in the south, I even saw people dry coconut tree leaves in the road that they were going to use to repair their thatched roofs for their homes. But this whole experience did cause me to reflect and appreciate something that I suppose I can take for granted, and that is, the ability to travel. To get around and to go to the places I want to go, and do the things that I want to do, what a luxury that is when you can easily do that, and what a big part roads play in all of that. Without roads, life would come to halt, no matter where you live.

When it comes to life, we are all on a road, we are all on a spiritual journey. Our roads may not all be the same, but we do have a common destination, our destination is meant to be heaven, our ultimate goal is to be with God in His kingdom. And of course, there are things in our life that make traveling that road more difficult, and there are things that make that journey more easy, more expedient. And the easier it becomes for us to travel that road, the more accessible the spiritual life becomes for us. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves, what kind of things make it difficult for us to travel on our spiritual journey? What kind of things prevent us from traveling on the road to God, keeping us separated from Him? The most obvious and the most simple answer to that question is sin. Sin keeps us apart from God. And sin makes it difficult for us to reach our ultimate destination in life.

This is where today's gospel comes in. In today's gospel we have John the Baptist who was called to prepare the way of the Lord by making straight his paths, by making the winding roads straight, and the rough ways smooth. In other words, he was make traveling on that road to God more accessible for us. And how was John to accomplish this goal? He was to do this by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So now we have to ask ourselves, why was this sort of preparation so necessary? Why do you have to prepare people for the Lord's coming through repentance and forgiveness of sins, isn't there another way? Well think about it this way: When Jesus does come, he is going to come so as to give us the Word of God, he comes to give us truth and life. These are great gift that Jesus offers, but the problem is, who will be ready and willing to accept these gifts? What kind of people will have their hearts and minds open to receive the truth that Jesus means to bring us? It is only those who are willing to admit that they do sin, and need forgiveness, it is only those who are prepared to accept that they need to change, those are the ones that have the ability to really listen to Jesus and allow his Word to penetrate their hearts. People on the other hand who are not reconciled with God and don't care to be, people who are selfish and who are unable to see anything wrong or a need for change in their lives, people

who don't think they need to be saved from the corruption around them, they are not going to accept Jesus. They are not going to be open to accept anything different from what is already in their hearts. And that is just the reality.

Really, this is perhaps one of the biggest spiritual challenges that we face in the western world today. Because when people have a lot of things, when people don't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, or how will their basic needs be taken care of, and on top of that, when just about every kind of entertainment or diversion is available to people for their own enjoyment and pleasure, sometimes it can become hard for people to see that there is something missing in their life. When on the surface people appear to have everything, it can be easier to stay there rather than dig deeper and see their own spiritual poverty. It's only when people who are willing to admit that there is something more to life, it is when people who are willing to admit to their faults and failings and try to make a change for the better, they are the ones whom God can transform with His Word. Therefore, John the Baptist's mission was to open up and convert as many hearts as possible, so that they will be ready and able to receive the Word of God when he comes.

It is conversion that is at the heart of the sacrament of Reconciliation. This is why we push confession this time of year. Its so easy for us sometimes to overlook our sins and not realize what they cost Jesus Christ. It is easy to make excuses and rationalize the things we have done. Going to confession forces us to directly face up to and name what it is we need forgiveness for. The better we are able to do that, the better we are able to travel down that road that leads to God.

If, on the other hand, you won't even confess your sins to a priest behind a screen, there is little chance of you progressing much farther in your spiritual life. That is what confession is for, to help us along our spiritual journey, to help us on the road toward salvation. With out it, there are too many obstacles in the way, and too much congestion on that road that makes it almost impossible for us to get very far. But if we are serious about removing those obstacles by confessing our sins and reconciling with God, then we will find that our journey on our path towards God becomes much easier, the winding road will be made straight, the rough ways made smooth, and we will be prepared to receive the Lord in our hearts, and in our lives when he comes.

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