

15th Sunday OT Year B
July 14-15, 2018

Take nothing for the journey.

Readings: Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-10; Mark 6: 7-13

When I heard of the method of training, I knew immediately that I could never be a Jesuit. Wherever possible, some are submitted to certain tests of their vocation; to teaching catechism in the village churches; to tending to the sick in hospitals; and even to going about on a pilgrimage or missionary journey without money or other provision. I know of men who were given a bus ticket to Mexico with \$50 in their wallet and no debit card. “We’ll see you in 30 days,” they were told. Nope. Not for me!

But after reflecting on this week’s Gospel, I think one can see the impetus for such an idea. It has been used as a means of testing, but in the time of Jesus, it seems the message was even more radical. It was not for 30 days; rather it was for the rest of their lives. It was meant to highlight the complete dependence upon God for sustenance, for guidance.

I surmise most do not relish tests of faith. Especially when they entail hardship. Nor am I implying that we are to run away from hardship, only that we do not naturally seek it out.

Our second reading teaches us that there is a plan, and that Jesus has made known to us the mystery of his will in accord with his favor that he set forth as a “plan for the fullness of times.” But there was also the clear implication that the plan would entail hardship. We were never promised an easy life, but we were promised that our life would have purpose.

Do you believe that? How radically could you demonstrate your belief that life has a plan and purpose? I still think I may well have crumbled with \$50 in my pocket, struggling in a foreign country. Yet, the strength of the human person in time of challenge can be remarkable; we find strength where we thought we had none.

When we are stripped, left without our worldly possessions or creature comforts, we can no longer hide behind them. We so often find refuge in things, and while this is not evil *per se*, they can easily become the primary source of refuge. Then Jesus Christ cannot operate the place in our lives that he desires and that discipleship demands.

And at times, discipleship even demands of us to undergo suffering. Bishop Fulton Sheen used to say that there is nothing worse than wasted suffering. He said-“Do not feel that suffering is an obstacle to the road to heaven; it can be the road itself.” Indeed, it can become the road. How frustrating must it be to be passed over for a promotion when you know you have done an excellent job and believe in your heart that other considerations led to a decision.

How exhausting it must be to be in and out of the hospital, perpetually sick. How devastating it is to see one’s own children drift away from the faith, one by one, little by little. How discouraging to desire to live a life of faith and discover opposition from one’s own friends who continually question your motivation for living a Catholic life in present day society. These and so many other sufferings are borne by good and faithful people.

Wasted suffering is fatiguing and frustrating, but if you receive your sufferings as something allowed by God and you see them through, you accept them and smile through them as best you can. Sufferings can then become something very powerful and good for us and the rest of the world.