



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

March 7, 2021 Third Sunday of Lent

Mark Twain has famously said, "When I was 17 years old, I thought that my father was a fool. But when I became 22, I was amazed at how much the old man had learned in five years." Twain's point of course is not that his father changed. He did. In those five years between 17 and 22 he experienced new things that allowed him to appreciate who his father was. We do not begin life with all that we need. We begin with partial knowledge. But we push forward. It takes time and experience to deepen our knowledge of ourselves, of the people around us, and the world in which we live. As we move A New Way Forward, we are looking backwards as well, things become clearer.

This is the experience of the disciples in today's gospel. Jesus is talking about the temple of his body, but the crowds around him and his disciples believe he is talking about the temple in Jerusalem. The evangelist tells us that it is only later, after Jesus' resurrection, that his disciples remembered his words and understood them. For the disciples looking backwards made things clearer as they moved ahead. Jesus' words didn't change. The apostles did.

This is the pattern of our lives. We often imagine, when we make major decisions in our lives that we know what we are getting into. But this is seldom the case. For example, when you committed yourself to your spouse on your wedding day, the vows that you exchanged were heartfelt and sincere. But you had only partial knowledge of what those vows meant, or who that person is. It takes time and experience for you to be able to say, "Now I know what it means to love another person for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health." What your vows mean becomes clearer when you look back on them after 10, 30, or 60 years of married life. Your vows haven't changed. You have.

And this is true of most major decisions in our lives. We decide: "I'm going to do this as a career. I think I am ready to have children. I am going to commit myself to this person as a friend." We make all those decisions with the best knowledge we have at the time. But what we are deciding only becomes clear after years of living it. It is only after our business goes through a crisis, after we sit by the bedside of a sick son or daughter, when we separate from a friend and together find our way back, that we discover what saying "yes" means.

Now this is a scary way to live, finding out only gradually what we have already committed ourselves to. But here is the good news. Although our life becomes clear to us only as we look backwards, our life is completely clear to God and we turn to Him as we forge A New Way Forward. Although we understand only gradually what our commitments involve, God understands us fully. And because God loves us, God works to see that our lives will not end up being impossible or destructive. When it begins to dawn on you that your marriage, career, or friendship is more than you bargained for, different from what you thought, and more difficult than you had planned, it is important to remember that although this is news to you, it is not news to God. We understand our lives by looking backwards, but God is the one who is constantly leading us forward. That is why we should trust God. That is why we should believe that our lives are not random or wasted. That is why we should have faith that each day that we live, God is taking us a step closer to the life that has been planned for us from the start.

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