

Commentary to the Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C



Pope John XXIII told us, "You may be the only Bible that someone may ever read."

Dag Hammarskjöld, the late Secretary General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wrote but one book. And even then it was not published until after his death in an airplane crash in Africa in 1961. But what a volume it is! It will be read and prayed over up to a day after the Parousia. It is titled *Markings*. In it, Secretary Hammarskjöld wrote, "The longest journey is the journey inwards of him who has chosen his destiny."

As the Gospel of Luke opens, an unknown writer points out that the Christ is about to begin His own "longest journey." It is a trip by foot, but also it is a "journey inwards" as he moves without hesitation to complete the destiny marked out for Him by the Father.

But our mystery writer wants us to realize that St Luke has the Teacher constantly on journeys. Mary, while bearing Him in her womb, journeyed to spend time with her cousin Elizabeth. Mary and Joseph of course journeyed to the city of Bethlehem for His birth. Subsequently they journeyed with the Infant to Jerusalem to present Him in the Temple to the Father. Then faithfully they journeyed with the Boy to the capital city to celebrate the solemn Passover.

But all these trips, outlined by the skillful and clever Luke, are comparatively speaking but sidebar

journeys. Luke has been preparing us all this time for THE GREAT JOURNEY which begins in today's Gospel. That momentous journey, beginning here in chapter 9, will close out in chapter 19. There we will read of His arrival in Jerusalem ready to begin the processions of Palms. With that entry, Luke wants us to reflect that the Master is preparing Himself for His death, resurrection, and ascension.

For obvious reasons, scholars call Luke's long account of THE GREAT JOURNEY the Journey Narrative. It occupies a third of the Lucan Gospel and is found in his Gospel alone.

Luke lets us see that the Teacher is about to commence THE GREAT JOURNEY in the first line of today's Gospel. "Now as the time drew near for Him to be taken up to heaven, He resolutely took the road for Jerusalem..."

My unknown author assures us that the GREAT JOURNEY is a type for the journey that each Christian and Catholic must take. All of us should be walking resolutely on the road that will take us to the heavenly Jerusalem. Obviously we will need instructions for such an important march. And happily we will find them in the ten chapters of the Journey Narrative. They make up a textbook of pilgrim instructions. They are a how-to manual of Christian discipleship. They tell us how we shall walk with the Nazarene on this none too easy and slippery road.

In the Lucan manual, the words retreat or defeat will never be mentioned. At all costs, we must keep advancing. And, if we stumble and fall, we must like our Master pick ourselves up and move forward once again.

The type of disciples that Jesus the Christ is looking for is illustrated in a story told by a preacher. The Church was undergoing persecution in a certain country. The Catholics of one village gathered together for the Eucharist in their church. Suddenly their door loudly burst open. Standing before them was a soldier menacingly brandishing a machine gun. He shouted, "If you do not really believe in your Christ, get out immediately to save your lives." A number of people slinked out one by one. The soldier kicked the door after them. Then he said to those remaining, "I too believe in Jesus. We are better off without those people."

None of those terrified people who remained in that church had looked back. They had no intention of retreating. Rather, they wanted to move forward at all costs into the Kingdom. None of them believed in good weather discipleship. Each was in for the long haul. And, as they were, so must we be in our

own GREAT JOURNEY.

Do not be one of those many who, as the preacher says, talk cream and live skim milk.

Fr. James Gilhooley