

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jul 3rd 2016

Omaha, Nebraska, our city, is located in the center of the United States, half way between Chicago, on Lake Michigan, and Denver, on the shore of the Rocky Mountains. The interstate highway passes right through our city. It is there that the whimpers come from child-bound back seats in whizzing cars, the famous summer-time plea, "Are we there yet?" The journey, the pilgrimage, the desire to get there, are such a large part of human life. Roadside parks and various comfort stations along the way offer temporary relief, but the road constantly beckons the traveler.

Israel has had a long journey from prosperity through infidelity and back again. The Temple has been rebuilt and there is promise of more than a comfort station offered in today's First Reading. As the little folks in the back of the west-bound cars begin looking for the mountains immediately after leaving Omaha's beauties, so the people of Israel had been longing for the consolation of their holy home during their exile. In their own national history, they had stopped at various wayside altars in the false hope that they could worship that god and end the searching. Today's first reading is from the end of the prophecies from the Book of Isaiah. The picture given is that of a mother nursing her whimpering baby.

Jerusalem, as the city of God, is the terminus for God's people and, like a loving mother, God has been waiting to embrace all those who have kept faithful to the long road back. Acceptance, welcome, nourishment and a sense of being back home are promised and all within the experience of great joy for God and for God's children.

This prophecy is a comforting answer, not unlike my own mother would say when our family drove to northern Wisconsin each August, "We are getting very close now." She would remind us of just how good it was going to be when we got there and could even jump in the lake before unpacking the car. Somehow, my father forgot that part of the prophecy when we arrived. The jump in the lake had a different context when he said it.

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus saying, "Go on your way." He is preparing a large group to get going, but with some definite instructions about the manner with which they are to go. Instead of a securing-sense offered by having maps, Jesus tells his followers that following Him now means trusting the unknown and indefinite so that God's motherly care for them will be known. We will hear this missioning to mystery and we might wonder about the efficiency of sending these people out without adequate preparation.

They do return at the end of today's reading and apparently have had great success. Jesus welcomes them, but advises them that the real cause for joy is not success, but their names being written in heaven. Their efficiency is a result of God's affection.

Where is the "there" at that they want to be? For Jesus, the "there" is wherever one can be mapless, but not hapless. In other words, insecurity is the end of the journey and the beginning of God's being our securing Mother. My mother had a strong wish for us to trust both our parents enough, at least, to keep quiet in the back seat and quit bothering each other. We were going to a wonderful lake for a whole month, but we wanted to be "there" now. She encouraged us to count cows, windmills, and cars from Illinois who were heading back south and out of our state! With six of us kids in the car, it was the best

she could do without taking each of us on her lap and comforting our innocent anxieties.

Jesus sends us with the promise that if we trust God's promises and care, we might not quarrel, question and quit as we make our journey to proclaim that God is mothering us towards the "there" to which we move through the "here" and even where the "here" is seems rather insecure at times. Isaiah speaks words quite reminiscent of things my Mother would tell us from the front seat, "When you see this, your heart shall rejoice and your bodies flourish like the grass; the lord's power shall be known to His servants." That all sounded very good, but we still wanted to get there now!

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