

HOMILY

The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time *July 11/12, 2009*

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In today's gospel, Jesus charged his disciples to take nothing for their journey except a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts—but to wear sandals and only one tunic, not even a change of clothes. As we hear Jesus' instructions, Saint Francis of Assisi comes to mind. He took just these words of Jesus' instruction literally. Francis and his little band of followers took nothing with them on their journey. They owned nothing, not even the tunic on their backs. They begged for their living. Is this what Jesus had in mind for us? The key words in this passage are not “walking stick” or “bread” or “money” or “sandals” or “tunic.” The key word in this passage is “**journey.**”

Jesus wants us to see that life is supposed to be a journey. In fact, whether you like it or not, life *is* a journey. From birth to death, life is a journey. If you resist it, life is going to drag you along anyway.

Jesus came as a teacher to say, “If you want to know how to make the journey successfully, then follow me.” If that is the case, then what Jesus is saying is you don't need all this stuff for your journey. The secret of life is not to be found in material things, it's to be found in spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity is what enables you to go into any situation in your life without props, without masks, without armor, and without stimulants or depressants. Remember the story of David? Little David against the giant Goliath? He entered into battle only with trust that the God who was with him would not abandon him.

That is true for everyone. When you are on your journey, you come across a Goliath, some giant. It may be a challenge to you or a life-threatening illness, or a terrible decision you are forced to make, or a circumstance that is out of your control. Then possessions, like what you wear, what you drive, what you eat, none of that helps. What matters when you are on that journey and you come to those

border crossings, those places where you pass into land that is unfamiliar and unwanted? What counts then is courage and grace and trust and assurance. That's what faith gives you, and that's what life in Jesus is all about. Be free. Do not be saddled down.

That brings us back to further instructions from Jesus:

“Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more precious than they?”

You see, it's not so much about possessions, it's about faith.

Take the family that lived according to the model of the successful family in America, the image that we are bombarded with day after day, that the secret of life is in accumulating things. They believed that image until one day they discovered that they had all the things they wanted. They had everything that money could buy, but they had none of the things that money *can't* buy. And they were at the place in their life where they wanted that now more than anything else. They didn't even know how to describe what *it* was. They had no words to describe it except that something was missing in their life.

So they began a journey. They decided that their journey was going to start at home. Maybe, they thought, there was something buried underneath all the stuff. So they began unloading, and they discover that the less that they had, the more they become a family. Now they are beginning to move. Now they are on the journey.

They took the next step in the journey and they started giving to others. They got outside of themselves. They gave themselves to something larger than themselves. They felt better about themselves. The mother said, “I remember reading somewhere: ‘You can't love others until you love yourself first.’ But now I know that the opposite is true. You can't love yourself until you give yourself to others.”

When they discovered that, they got moving real fast. They are on their journey. They belong to the Church now. They thought church was something that was there when you needed it, like a hospital. You go to it when you get knocked out or knocked down in life. But now they are on a journey. They see the Church differently now. They see the Church as something you use to prepare for the journey, so it's not so much like a hospital. It's more like a traveler's aid office, or it's like the welcome center on the highway. You go there to get directions. You go there to get food, the kind that doesn't perish, the kind that you can take with you on your journey.

You go to church to meet travelers...pilgrims, we call them here in church. And you go to church to hear about great pilgrims, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and so many others like Francis of Assisi, who made of their whole life a journey of faith.

You see, today is all about a journey. And you and I are supposed to be on it. And Jesus says, "If you want to do it right, don't get loaded down with all that stuff. God will provide. Then follow me; and if you follow me, take nothing with you except faith. All else gets in the way!"

