



Thoughts on the Journey...

Suanne Gettings—Pastoral Associate—February 23, 2020

Every Monday, my Dad would transport my sisters and I on I-74 West from Cincinnati to the place where we attended high school. Coming up around the bend and over the hill, the spires of this convent/school, greeted us for the start of a new week. Five days a week, we lived with the sisters at the Franciscan Motherhouse in Oldenburg, Indiana. Overall, it was a great experience, but it wasn't without its challenges. One of the adjustments of attending a Catholic girls' boarding school, was learning to get along with other girls from all walks of life. Living with that many people taught me how to get along with others even when they were difficult.

My second year at the academy, a new girl by the name of Tina enrolled as a Junior. From the start, she had difficulty communicating with others in the sense that she had little to no eye contact and spoke in a very high pitched voice with little clarity in her thought process. Most of her conversations revolved around Elvis and her stuffed animals. It was a struggle for her to relate to others her age as well as being a struggle for others to relate to her. For a lack of a better word, I would say that she was peculiar which left her wide-open for criticism. It didn't help that she had six toes on one of her feet that contributed to her oddity. For the most part, the girls at the academy became relentless in their cruel jokes and comments. What made matters worse, Tina responded with negative comments of her own or would stick her tongue out at people she didn't like. In one way or another, everyone was contributing to this negativity either by exchanging insults, laughing at her misfortune, or by keeping quiet. I fell in the 'keeping quiet' category which I am ashamed of to this day. Fortunately, Tina found a friend in another student and they kept company throughout.

I think of Tina once in awhile and wonder what impact the cruelty has had on her life going forward. She was an easy target and the rest of us were easy targets, as well. We were all targets of Satan who sits and waits for opportunities to stir hatred and division.

In Matthew's gospel this week, Jesus is speaking to his apostles about how we are to deal with one another. He denounces the notion of '*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*'. Instead, Jesus tells them to offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you, turn the other cheek; if anyone presses you into service for a mile, go two miles; give to the one who asks of you and don't turn your back on the one who wants to borrow. Jesus further instructs,

“You have heard that it was said, *You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father,*“

Jesus' message is a difficult one for most of us. We live in a society that leans heavy toward an *eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. It is played out in all aspects of our life and is reinforced in social media, films, books, etc. It is so much more attractive to get our pound of flesh rather than reacting in kindness.

In the second reading from 1st Corinthians we, as Jesus' followers, are referred to as temples of God. And as his temples the Spirit of God dwells in us. Every time we treat those around us with anger, revenge, disrespect, and malice, we throw trash in the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Over time, we destroy the temple that God has created in us...the temple that God makes holy.

There is a story I heard years ago that stays with me today and speaks to this reflection: A young Indian boy approaches his wise grandfather with a dilemma. "What is your dilemma?", the grandfather asks. The boy responds, "I have two wolves that are fighting inside of me. One is kind, gentle, and compassionate. The other is angry, bitter, and hurtful." The grandfather asks, "So, what is your dilemma?" The grandson asks, "Which wolf will win the battle of my heart?" And the grandfather answers, "The one that you feed."