



## *Thoughts on the Journey... 9/30/18*

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It was around 1965 when my mother allowed me to go to downtown Cincinnati on a bus alone. I clearly remember the day because it meant real independence for me. I took some money that I had saved from babysitting and wanted to buy a hamster from Lees Pet Store. My mother didn't know that my shopping plans included a new pet rodent, but I had a feeling if I told her, she would abort my mission. In my mind, with nine children at home, who would even notice a tiny little hamster?

After several hours, my shopping was complete and I went to my bus stop in front of Shillito's Department Store on the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Vine. There I waited for the #35 Cleves-Warsaw bus. In the distance, I could hear a man's voice. His foreboding shouts made my ears perk up and my head turned from side-to-side trying to zone in on from where he was coming. Having a flare for the dramatic at that age, I couldn't wait until his face appeared. Hard-pressed to hear the message he was heralding, I did pick up on a few words: "repent", "tribulation", "coming of the Lord". His words change the mood of the downtown crowd and things quieted as he turned the corner and moved toward the people at the bus stop. Suddenly, there he was: bold, determined, sure of his message. Fire and brimstone shot out of his mouth like a spitting dragon on the warpath and I could feel my eyes rising from the top of my cheeks through the top of my forehead. He was bigger than life! I felt glued to the bench and could not take my eyes off him. He centered himself in front of the group of us waiting for the bus and held us hostage to his message as though it was his personal amphitheater. He wore gray suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He sported a black bible that he held open on the edge of his left hand that seemed connected to his words as it moved back and forth with the fluctuation of his speech. He must have known the verses, because he hardly looked at the book. I saw my bus coming, but I didn't dare move, partly out of fear and partly because I was captivated.

At that time of my life, 'church' consisted of subdued Latin Masses, with familiar rituals, that were contained within the walls of the parish church where our family belonged. This evangelizer was my first encounter with a very public, in-your-face preacher and I wasn't sure what to think. He was different. It was my introduction to Armageddon and I was now re-thinking the hamster that was scratching around in the cardboard box on my lap. He made an impression on me at a very young age that I have carried in my memory all these years.

In the gospel of Mark, the apostle John approached Jesus concerned about a person who was driving out demons in Jesus' name. He wanted to prevent the man from doing deeds in the name of Jesus because this man was not part of Jesus' inner circle of followers. Jesus replied to John:

**"Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward."**

Growing up in the Catholic Church through the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, I had the distinct impression that my role as a Catholic was one of *spectator*. There were limits to what lay people were permitted to do. During those years I thought the heavy hand of *holiness* was always connected to a white collar and a set of vestments: they were in the inner circle and the rest of us were not. It wasn't until I went to a Catholic girl's boarding high school that everything began to change! The Franciscan sisters at Immaculate Conception Academy included us in the planning and participation of the liturgy; it was an expectation and a privilege. Later, the Glenmary priests and brothers were all-inclusive and affirmed for me that we are all part of the Lord's inner circle and active participants in the mission of the church. It was transforming and profoundly changed my relationship with Christ and my perception of who we are in relation to building the Kingdom of God. To further add to the evolution of my role as an authentic Catholic Christian servant, were the Dominican sisters who encouraged and supported me in trusting that the Holy Spirit has given me gifts that I have been called to use..

Pope John XXIII once remarked that **"We are not on earth to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flowering garden of life."** His influence in Christianity is huge. In calling the Second Vatican Council, he not only reshaped the face of Roman Catholicism, but the face of the Church. "Cultivating a garden of life" is a wonderful calling and it demands the courage to step outside of the box and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us. We can't plant the seeds of new life and forget to nurture them. Even though I choose a different path to spread the Word of God, the evangelizer at the bus stop those years ago had the courage to do what he believed the will of God was in his life. Each and every one of us is relevant and Jesus extends to us the invitation to step into His inner circle.