



Thoughts on the Journey...

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For 3 years, in the late 1970's, I had the privilege of working for Glenmary Missions as the Religious

Education Director for 3 mission parishes in rural Georgia. Fr. Bill Smith was the pastor of these three churches. In addition to Fr. Bill, I served on a team with two Glenmary brothers and two sisters; the brothers were carpenters and builders who worked on substandard housing in the area, one of the sisters ran the clothing/food pantry, and the other was a nurse practitioner who ran the free clinic. All five of them lived their vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty with joy and made serving God's people look effortless. As a team, the six of us celebrated daily Mass together, and prayer was central to everything we did. The Glenmary community was an instrumental source of strength – living examples of faith in action. I felt fortified and invigorated by my participation in their community and thought I had died and gone to heaven!

My faith had grown tremendously during that time. I felt the presence of God in my life every day that I was there and by the time I left, believed that my faith was unshakable. In the summer of 1980, I decided to leave Georgia and move to Columbus to finish my education at O.S.U. I worked fulltime as a residential supervisor for United Cerebral Palsy at their residential site at Capital Park and went to school fulltime. My schedule was grueling and I went from feeling a lush, vibrant, unshakeable faith to a faith life that whittled its way to nothingness in a matter of months. The security of a praying, serving, and living in a faith community in Georgia where I felt God's embrace every day, abruptly came to a halt and I was now living in a very secular world with very little spiritual support. I began to doubt everything in relation to what I believed and began to question, *Was what I felt during my time in Georgia real? Did I really experience the presence of God in my life? Or was I just riding on the coat tails of everyone else's faith? Where was God now?*

In the Gospel of John this weekend, we heard Jesus present the question to a doubting Thomas,

“Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

Thomas, as one of the apostles, had the luxury of being in Jesus' company on a regular basis before our Lord's death. After Jesus' death, Thomas' physical accessibility to Jesus had changed, creating doubt for him. He could no longer see, touch, or hear Jesus in the same tangible way that he did when he was with Jesus before his death. It is our senses that help create our perceptions and when we can no longer *sense* the presence, sometimes our perceptions change. There are times when we see and feel the presence of Christ in our lives and our faith is strong and alive and there are times when we experience the *dark night of the soul* when we doubt and question if our faith is real - if God is real. We all come to believe because we see, hear, or feel the presence of Christ in our life. It may not come in the way that it did to Thomas, but we have faith because the Holy Spirit has revealed Truth to us through someone else or through some experience. So is true of doubt; at one time or another, most of us experience the desert when things are not so clear.

In September of 1979, Mother Teresa wrote to her friend, Fr. Michael van der Peet, ***“Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the silence and emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear.”*** This holy and revered woman had doubts about her faith, had doubts about God's love for her. But, it wasn't always that way. At one point in Mother Teresa's life, she had to fully experienced the love of God. It is that love that was the force that called her to a lifelong vocation of service to God's people. And, Mother Teresa gave her life fighting devastating poverty with her hands of mercy – even in the dark nights of her soul, even in the deserts of her journey, even in her doubt.

The message here for all of us is that sometimes 'doubt' is the path to a deeper holiness. When we persist in serving God, persist in our trust and belief, persist in our prayer and sacramental life, persist in doing right, persist in loving our neighbor, even in the face of our doubts and our questions, we will be given the strength to sustain us in our mission. We all BELIEVE because we have seen Christ at one time or another, in one way or another, but how much more blessed are we when we still believe even though we do not see, even when we do not hear, even when we do not feel God's presence. Blessed are we who still believe!