



Thoughts on the Journey...

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Have you ever looked toward heaven and asked God one of these questions: *What are you thinking? Are you listening to me when I talk to you? Why do you allow this kind of thing happen to faith-filled people? You're not what I expected - are you really my Savior?*

There are three central figures in this Advent Season who may have asked themselves these very questions at one time or another. However, they mostly speak to us of TRUST in God in the face of adversity: Mary, the Mother of God, Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, and John the Baptist, cousin to Jesus and the herald who is to announce the coming of the Messiah. Each one of these real-life people in salvation history were presented with the challenges that come with being a believer. Each one of them, had to let go of THEIR notion of who they thought the Messiah would be in order to see the true Messiah. They had to let go of the "law of God" as they knew it, in order to be obedient to the will of God; They had to let go of their worldly dreams and expectations in order to serve the kingdom; they had to abandon their fears and cling to their trust in the Father in order to be led by the Spirit.

Like all true believers and saints who have gone before us, they embarked on a journey of faith that took them to places and situations they never would have imagined. Each new realm revealing another unexpected dimension of God. The challenges were uncomfortable, painful, confusing, and lonely. But, each place, each challenge, each circumstance contributed to conversion and a deeper understanding of who God is and how God works - never fully grasping with human reason, but leading them intuitively into closer union.

In Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist is in prison and sends his disciples to Jesus inquiring if he is the Messiah or should he look for another. Here is John who has spent his life preparing for the coming of a Messiah. He lived a humble existence in the desert eating only locust and honey, wearing garments that were the typical garb of the poor. He preached repentance and conversion of heart. John lived a life of discipline, humility, sacrifice, and fortitude in the face of adversity. He

bold and confident in his mission to prepare the way of the Lord. John was a radical servant of God yet, as he sat in prison soon to be beheaded, is it any wonder that he questions if Jesus was the Messiah?

And Jesus' response to John's inquiry was,

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

In other words, *John, I am not the Messiah you were expecting. But, I am the Messiah, who has come to save the world. I am not here to save you from challenges that will lead you closer to me, but I am here to walk with you in your joy and your suffering, like the blind, the lame, the deaf, the lepers and all those living the human condition.*

Often, our belief becomes a struggle when we want Jesus to be the God that best suits us. Sometimes we let our own concept of Jesus get in the way of finding the true Jesus. We want all of our prayers to be answered yesterday; we want all of the outcomes of life's struggles to be as we would have them; we question God when we don't understand His ways.

In the end, John did not take offense to Jesus, instead he listened to Jesus as he taught him how to recognize him in his healing compassion and mercy and the good news of his profound love that brought hope to all.

As we continue to celebrate this season of joyful anticipation of the coming of our Messiah, let us follow the example of these Advent people. Like St. John the Baptist, the Blessed Mother, and Joseph, let us let go of our comfortable expectations and notions of who Jesus should be and trust that Jesus is exactly the Messiah we need: the Messiah who, in all things, is leading us to a deeper conversion and unity with his Father.