



Thoughts on the Journey...

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If you head westbound for about an hour on I-74 out of Cincinnati, you will come to the Batesville/Oldenburg exit in Indiana. Take a right off the exit and follow the

winding country road to the village of Oldenburg, Indiana. When you see the spires of the Franciscan Sister's motherhouse, you are getting very close to my high school alma mater, Immaculate Conception Academy. The Academy was home for a number of girls who boarded there during the school year. For the most part, the female residents who lived there during the week, came from different parts of Ohio and Indiana and shared life, day and night, with the Franciscan sisters who were our caretakers. Living with other people from different walks of life, different socioeconomic backgrounds, with different value systems taught me a great deal about getting along with other people. It was a wonderful experience overall. I think that is true for most of the girls who attended. We all managed to get along for the most part. But, as in all things, there are exceptions to every experience.

I remember the first day she arrived at the academy. Tina was a transplant from another school. She was assigned to my table in the dining hall, so I had a unique vantage point in getting to know her a little sooner than the other girls. From the get-go, I knew she was going to have a rough go. Tina had all the looks of a geek but lacked the smarts that could have been her redeeming value. She was immature for her age, not well kept, poor hygiene, and she had a knack for insulting people without an awareness or an ability to pick up on visual cues. She just lacked social grace. We all wore uniforms, except at bedtime, but if we didn't, I'm pretty sure she wouldn't have been identified as a *fashionista*. This left her wide-open for criticism and when her name was mentioned in any circles, the giggling and the snide remarks would begin, sometimes within ear-shot of Tina. If things weren't bad enough for this poor girl, it was discovered one night during shower-time that Tina had six toes on one foot! If you think actually having six toes on one foot was an embarrassment for this girl, it paled in comparison to the other things that people made up about her. I tried to befriend her in the sense that I listened to her drone on about her favorite cartoons and other things that were of no interest to me, but I must admit there were a number of times that I did everything to avoid her and headed in a different direction when I saw her coming my way. I did not speak badly about her, but I was present for many conversations when other girls were trash-talking her and said nothing in her defense.

Looking back on it now, I was in a unique position to turn things around for Tina because I enjoyed popularity with my peers and was even the class president at that time. Instead of showing real leadership by being a true friend to Tina, I avoided her like the plague and ignored those who were hurting her.

In Luke's gospel this weekend, Jesus, is laying out for his disciples the very difficult path to being his followers. He begins by telling them to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Jesus goes on to say, "give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back."

“Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. “

Jesus' message is countercultural and tests our sense of fairness and justice. As flawed humans we want our pound of flesh. In order to make ourselves feel bigger and better, we often try to make those we dislike feel smaller and insignificant. Instead of doing the hard work of forgiveness, we will cling to our anger resentment not allowing healing to take place. Love, as Jesus teaches, is an action word

In reflecting on this gospel passage, I couldn't help but think of Tina and how far I fell short of being a good neighbor to her. She was beaten down by criticism, robbed of her dignity by the many ways she was shunned by her peers, and stripped of her spirit only to be abandoned to face her loneliness. Not one us Catholic girls in this Catholic boarding school could see our way to love God, by loving Tina.

How easy is it to love people who are **easy** to love? Good neighbors, good friends, loving family - they don't always require the challenging love that takes hard work; they are not usually the people we go to the other side of the road to avoid. But for those people we encounter who are irritating, less gifted, and who sometimes suck the life out of us, our love must dig deeper and requires a heavier investment. We're being called to love with all our heart, with all our being, with all our strength, and with all our mind, That's what it takes to follow Christ, that's what it takes to be a good neighbor, and that's what it takes to inherit eternal life.