



# Thoughts on the Journey

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When my daughter, Jenna, was still in high school, she came home one evening and told me about her friend, Marie, who had an experience with a visionary. The visionary was a Catholic Filipino man named Brother Carmelo Cortez who claimed the Blessed Mother appeared to him over 100 times in the 1990's. Marie and her family went to see Bro. Cortez when he was visiting in Cincinnati. She shared with Jenna her amazing experience and returned with a rose petal that had the image of the Last Supper. In Jenna's excitement, she kept saying repeatedly, "Mom, you have to see this; it's amazing!" So, before making any judgements, I agreed to go and see the rose petal. We arrived at Marie's home and she presented to me the petal in question; it was even more stunning than what was described to me. It was clearly a case of you had-to-see-it-to-believe-it. Marie told us that Bro. Cortez would be at the old bishop's estate in Cincinnati for the next week. My kids pleaded to go and I was more than willing to travel to see this in person.

The next evening, we went to Cincinnati to the healing Mass and the presentation by Bro. Carmelo. Our drive to the event was filled with conversation and hopeful anticipation that they would receive a rose petal with a religious image. I didn't want to be a killjoy, but I did want to present the possibility that they may receive a rose petal with no image. Whether an image or not, we have to remember that Jesus shows no favorites and if we are meant to receive such a 'gift', it's an added blessing. But, if we did not receive, it should not change our faith or trust in Christ.

The entire experience was extraordinarily inspiring. Rose petals were plucked from the tops of roses and thrown into a vat of mineral water. Bro. Cortez stirred the petals with his hand and then the people walked forward to receive their petal. Each of us were prayed over and we witnessed healings. The petals with images were truly miraculous.

In this week's gospel from Mark, a leper came to Jesus and asked that if it is Jesus' will, that he be made clean.

**“Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, ‘I do will it. Be made clean.’ The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.”**

Jesus then cautioned him to tell no one and to show himself to the priests and make an offering as prescribed by Moses. The man left and began telling everyone. As a result of his disobedience, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly and stayed outside in lonely places.

Who doesn't love a good miracle? And, when you witness a miracle, who doesn't want to tell everyone? It's not surprising that the healed leper wanted to tell the world. But, was his healing the only thing the man gleaned from his encounter with Jesus? Perhaps, Jesus' greatest healings were not the obvious healings, but rather internal healings and conversions of the soul. As the crowds of people followed Jesus wherever he went, the scene begs the questions, What did they want? What were they looking for? What kind of Messiah were they expecting? In the case of Jesus, timing was everything. The good news was not just about his public ministry; the real good news came after his resurrection when there was sufficient understanding of who he actually was: the very Messiah they awaited.

Our experience with Bro. Carmelo and the rose petals was unforgettable. Each one of us received a different religious image that looked like a photo engraved on a petal. The image I received was that of a crown of thorns. I won't deny that I was in awe of that spiritual gift. But, I didn't need the miracle to confirm that my Messiah was alive and well and the divine force in my life. We are asked to believe even though we don't experience a miracle. The real test of faith is to continue to trust and believe in God's love even in the face of the everyday ups and downs the sorrows and the joys.