

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021B

Four people at the crossroads of their lives express the theme of today's Gospel reading. Two turned back, one stayed, and the others still under consideration. The first person is the man of our gospel. A good man, be it noted, and also, be it noted, expressly loved by Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain everlasting life?" Although wealthy, he had the insight that wealth was not the answer to life. As I said, a good man. Jesus presents him with a crossroads decision. If you really want everlasting life, Jesus challenges, let go. Let go of your wealth, sell what you have and be my disciple. The silence. The pondering. The hesitation. Decision time at the crossroads of his life. There was no question of choosing between good and evil. The issue was choosing between the good and the better. The road less traveled. Discipleship. Quietly, he turned around and moved away. He had chosen. He simply said no.

The second person also said no. He lived two thousand years after the first man. He was erudite, charming, profound. A good man. I am referring to Sir Kenneth Clark. He later wrote his two-volume autobiography in which he declared that he was in fact a dedicated secular humanist. He did not look down on religion or was indifferent to it. On the contrary, he says some beautiful things about religion, but he simply did not believe. But he does describe a religious experience he had.

It happened while he was sitting in the church of San Lorenzo in Italy. He writes: "For a few minutes, my whole being was irradiated with a kind of heavenly joy, far more intense than anything I have ever known." The whole event enthralled him and he said that he considered himself quite unworthy of such a beautiful experience and could not understand why it was given to him. But, as he reflected on the experience, he was faced with an awkward question. What should he do about it? He was not a religious person in any formal sense and he knew that, if he responded to this mystical experience, if he said yes at this particular crossroad of his life, his family and his friends would think that he had quite gone off the deep end. And so, like the first man of the gospel, he turned his back on it and said no. He wrote, "I think I was right. I was too deeply imbedded in the world to change course, but no doubt I had felt the finger of God and I am quite sure that, although the memory of that experience has faded, it helped me to understand the joy of the saints." Still, for all this, he turned back at a crossroad of his life.

The third person at the crossroad said yes, although a very reluctant yes. He, like the first two, was a good man. He had, however, no use for religion and in fact, when he went to college, he proclaimed himself an avowed atheist. But often to his dismay, he found himself several times unexpectedly at a crossroad. He wrote, "Some days a little door would open to an unspeakable burst of joy, then it would slam again. The door would open, then it would slam, open and slam." Finally, one day in his college room, something happened. The One who had been opening and slamming the door, opened it and stood there and wouldn't let him go. He was at the crossroad. He writes, "You must picture me alone in that room in Oxford, feeling the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I earnestly desired **not** to meet. It was in Trinity term of 1929 that I gave in, and admitted that God was God and I knelt and prayed, perhaps that night, the most rejected and reluctant convert in all of England." That man who said yes was C.S. Lewis, perhaps the most widely read Christian writer in the world today.

I said this was an account of four people at the crossroads of their lives. Two, as we have heard, said no, one said yes, and the other is under consideration. The one under consideration is you and me. Like all the others, we are good people but always – always - we stand at the crossroad waiting to be not merely good people, but disciples. Surrender, heroism, sacrifice, a deeper spirituality, making a difference - they all beckon at the crossroads of our lives. Sometimes, the call is to quiet witness. The mystic Caryl Chessman said, "Sometimes it may seem to us that there is no purpose to our lives. That going day after day to this office or that school or factory is nothing else but waste and weariness, but it may be that God has sent us there because, but for us, Christ would not be there. If our being there means that Christ is there, that alone makes it worthwhile." Maybe we're called to that: to be "more" Christ where we are.

Sometimes, we're called to that minor martyrdom of being openly counted as good Catholics. In 1906 the famed writer and staunch Catholic Hilaire Belloc decided to run for Parliament in deeply anti-Catholic England. He knew his Roman Catholicism would be a great obstacle, so when he gave his first campaign speech, he stepped up to the platform with rosary beads in his hand, told the crowd that he was a Roman Catholic, that he went to Mass every day of his life, and that he knelt down daily to say the rosary. He then told his listeners, "If you reject me on account of my religion, I shall thank God that He has spared me the indignity of being your representative."

How many times do we all stand at the crossroad? How many times does Jesus tell us he loves us and then asks for a bit more "Sell what you have - your time, your reputation, your fears, your hesitancy, your insecurities, your need to be one of the crowd - and, come, follow me." All of us know, deep down, that almost daily we stand at the crossroads. All of us are aware that Jesus has issued us an invitation to move from just doing good to doing better.

Let me share with you a moment in my life when I stood at the crossroads and failed to move from doing good to doing better. My failure to do so had disastrous results. It was early in my ministry in the far north. While I was working in Kangirsujuak a young woman, named Lydia, approached me and told me that she was being repeatedly abused by her husband. I tried to help her with all kinds of comforting words, which I now know were meaningless. At one point in her story she asked me to help her flee the village. I told her that I didn't have the funds to pay for a flight from Kangirsujuak to Montreal and that she should ask social services for help. I did nothing else to help her. A few days later I was informed that she was dead. She had been beaten to death. I had failed in my calling to true discipleship. To this very day I am haunted by what happened to Lydia.

True, we say, we have it under consideration. The gospel says, "Don't wait too long."

Deacon Gerry

