

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

“Whatever you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Give no offense, whether to Jew or to Greek or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in any way I can. I do this by seeking not my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved.

Imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

THE JOURNEY:

The real beginning of my journey was on the afternoon of Saturday, Jan 13th, when I arrived at LAX from Dayton for the flight to Australia - scheduled to leave at 8:30 PM. I would spend the next 14 hours in a cigar shaped tube where one of my days would magically disappear into the 'Twilight Zone' as we crossed the International Date Line. From that point on, I lost most track of time, days and dates. And somewhere in that same tube, I surmised, were some of the others I would soon meet when we arrived at our first destination, Cairns, Australia.

At the Cairns Airport, I met up with our tour guide, David Hill, who was holding a sign with Odyssey Travel. And here I also met up with my other 19 traveling companions along the same road, journeying on different paths, but all with the same goal in mind – the journey that lay before us.

David counted 20 of us and then herded us onto the coach to our hotel. He introduced himself, and as I looked around, I recognized faces of some of the passengers I had seen on the plane. But there was no time for formal introductions. That would happen at the hotel.

I was anxious and apprehensive as we sat in a semi-circle and David had asked us to say a little bit about ourselves...where were from, and why were came on the trip. As luck would have it, I was in the first chair and David pointed to me. By nature, I am very introverted when I am in a position where I don't know anyone and I find conversation very difficult. But I suddenly found myself telling them about my journey from New Jersey to Ohio in 1968 to begin my career with WPAFB, my finding my way to the Catholic Community there, my addition of a second, concurrent career as a deacon and my move to full time ministry on my retirement.

As we completed our stories, we all felt an instant connection as all of our receivers seemed tuned to the same frequency. What I told them about my history would spark many dinner conversations about my ministry during our travels. We were Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, United Congregationalists and one lone Catholic – yet, we were all of one mind set...the journey before us. Over the next days, dinner conversations from

those at my table centered on what I did in my ministry as Catholic deacon...they had never encountered one before. And I learned a lot about the other faith groups and every conversation among us was with a great deal respect and dignity.

At one of our dinners, one of the group came over and asked me if I would offer a grace before meals...which was a very humbling experience.

Fast forward to the end of the trip - We had just spent 21 days together, beginning as strangers and ending as friends. The afternoon of Feb 3rd, most of us were sitting in the airport terminal waiting for our flight back to the United States. It was a bitter-sweet moment waiting to board our flight for the very, very long trip (12 hours) back to LAX. I was a little more than uneasy because I would only have about 45 minutes on arrival to get my luggage, clear customs, transfer my luggage to an American Airlines flight to Chicago, and then on to Dayton. LAX is a big airport and this would only be my second time traversing the myriad obstacles to get to my connecting flights. I had asked Qantas for help on arrival at LAX because I wasn't sure I would have the speed or agility to make my connections. I was assured there would be someone at LAX from American Airlines to help me with one of those giant sized golf carts get to the right place.

God was watching after me after we all arrived LAX. Mine was one of the last pieces of luggage to come off the carousel, and I was thinking about trying to find out where to go from the carousel. I was glad I grabbed a cart, because no one was available to help me from American Airlines, so I was mostly on my own and having to traverse Customs and security...mostly up hill on a long ramp...the cart saved me much grief. After customs, I had to find the American Airlines connecting flights desk and get my luggage transferred to the Chicago Flight – still not thinking about time...just moving along as part of the 'Walking Dead'. After I did that, it was on to security and gate check, still oblivious of the time, never looking at my watch.

When I got to Security check in, it dawned on me that in the U.S. I would have to take off my shoes and remove my belt. I was really hoping I could miss that – not so much for my shoes, but because I had lost about 20 pounds. And if I had to raise my hands over my head in the scanner without my belt, my pants would fall down. I said a quick prayer that they would allow me to have a 'pat down' instead of removing everything. I no sooner finished that prayer, when the TSA security agent told me since I had a pre-checked TSA ticket, all I had to do was put my carry-ons through the scanner and they would let me through the metal detector so I would not have to take off my shoes or my belt – 'thank you, Lord!'

Finally, I was through all the checks and I saw a sign pointing to my gate area (Gates 40-48) and I continued to plod along. A one level escalator ride up to the 2nd

floor...DEAD END. I turned around and saw another elevator with Gates 40-48 up to level 5. Got off at level 5 and ANOTHER DEAD END. One more check and another elevator with Gates 40-48 on 3rd level (get the picture)?

Down another elevator to level 3, finally found the concourse to my gate (Gate 42A)...and I walked and walked and walked at as best a pace as I could muster. As I looked ahead, I saw Gate 42 in the far distance, and out of the corner of my left ear, I heard "Everyone for American Flight 0362 (my flight) should now be on board at Gate 42A. Now I broke into a 'crazy sort of gallop' like a horse with one broken leg and arrived at an empty gate, but with the door still open. My heart sank - but then, the gate keeper greeted me and said 'I made it.' I was the last person down the Jet Way, moments before the doors were closed behind me. I made it with seconds to spare.

I lumbered back to my seat and found the overhead compartment was already filled. I didn't even have the strength to lift my back pack up high enough to get in in the overhead. A nice young lady in my row helped me lift it into place and when I collapsed into my seat, she asked if I were OK – I was kind of breathing heavy. But I told her my story and I told her I knew God was watching out for me. She told me that not many people believed in prayer anymore and that it was good to hear someone say that. Then I settled back into my seat where (after a short conversation with her), I promptly fell asleep.

Temperature in Chicago was 27 degrees F - and then another hour flight to Dayton, where temp was 20 degrees F. I was met at airport by a most wonderful sight - the Quakenbushes and the Guilfooses who brought balloons, flowers and chicken soup...never was I so happy to see familiar faces in my life.

Home safe and sound – thanks to prayers and good wishes of my QAC Family and my new traveling companions. I hoped everyone else in my tour group had also gotten home safe and sound as well and I remembered them all in my thoughts and prayers for the rest of their journey.

Here we were, 20 travelers along the same road, journeying on different paths, but all with the same goal in mind – going home. We had a real bonding experience in these 21 days. We were no longer just Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, United Congregational faiths – and one lone Catholic. We were friends, all of one mind set...going home. But not yet home. Our current domiciles are only a 'way station' – a haven of rest. We still have work to do as we begin the daunting of completing the journey home.

This part of the longer journey is ended and I am home with the community I love. I am still riding a high with these new friends and our emails of concern for one another continue. I know that feeling will fade with time, since our chances of ever meeting again are slim and none. But, I sincerely hope, that as long as this feeling lasts, I remember the words of St Paul..."**We give no offense, whether to Jew or to Greek or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in any way I can.**" (St Paul).

Never give up. Keep plodding along the road you travel. There is no such thing as an ending, only a new beginning. Perform an act of random kindness for someone this week and bring joy into their life. We all need it. We are all traveling the same road. "**Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.**" — **St. Catherine of Siena.**

Yesterday, I had the privilege of welcoming a new member into our Catholic Christian community as he begins his journey of faith, Carson Lee Morris. Then, later in the day, many of us had the solemn privilege of helping escort one of our own, Nathan Nickell, on his final steps of his journey home.

So, for all of us as we journey on -

May God give you...

For every storm, a rainbow,

For every tear, a smile,

For every care, a promise,

And a blessing in each trial.

For every problem life sends,

A faithful friend to share,

For every sigh, a sweet song,

And an answer for each prayer. **I certainly had my share of prayers answered on my journey!**

Last Saturday night/through Sunday, I slept on and off though most of the day. Monday morning, first stop was OFF TO McDonald's to find the weight I had lost.

God is good!!!

Deacon Greg Cecere

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