

Three wise men come from the east bringing gifts to the infant Jesus, and in the process receive a gift worth the distance and effort they spent. After depositing their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, **they in turn receive a gift: THEY ARE RE-DIRECTED.**

That is what we all get after kneeling before Jesus: WE ARE RE-DIRECTED.

That different direction after kneeling before Jesus means that YOUR "JOY" IN LIFE will not be found in seeking happiness and fulfillment directly, *but be found in walking the way of service, sacrifice, and surrender.* **The new direction involves finding the holy in the least expected places, the very places we would most like to avoid.**

WOULDN'T YOU ALL LIKE TO AVOID THE "PAINS" OF THIS WORLD??? Jesus "RE-DIRECTS" us by inviting us to FACE THE PAINS OF LIFE "head-on" rather than avoiding them.

I remember that moment in which Peter makes the great confession that Jesus is the Christ of God. Right after that Jesus says he will be opposed by the religious leaders and will be killed. That is when Peter takes Jesus aside and "rebukes him". In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter and says in essence, "Your refusal to face pain is the kind of work that is at its core evil." Jesus then sets his face toward Jerusalem and faces the inevitable pain of life.

Jesus instructs us that our JOYS IN LIFE will not be in the ESCAPING THE PAINS AND EVILS, BUT WILL BE IN THE VERY MIDST OF THEIR "STORMS." You might remember also that Peter was the one who protested that storm on the sea. When we read the words of Jesus, "Peace, be still," we make a grave error. We assume that he was talking to the weather, but he was not. He spoke to Peter. God does not come and take us away from the inevitable storms of life. God comes in the form of the promised presence of calm in the midst of whatever happens to us. God has never promised to take us away from any of life's disasters or pain. God has always promised to go with us through all of them. That promised presence makes the difference.

When we make friends with the fact that to live is to know PAIN...THEN WE WILL SEE MORE CLEARLY IN OUR LIFE. We can see that the common thread in the human family is that EACH OF US experience PAIN. We are not united by joys. Joys are so varied, and people are joyous for very different reasons. We are not united by color or language or belief. **WE ARE UNITED BY THOSE THINGS THAT "GRIEVE" US.**

Carlisle Marney said, *"All our grief comes from one thing: something ends before we were ready for it to end."*

I have never found a more common thread among people in parish life than in the conversations that I have had with people who lost their Parents like I did. **The language of our pain and losses is the same.**

Garrison Keillor told the story of the time that his mother and father took him to the city to visit an aunt who was lonely and alone after the death of her husband of 55 years. He describes how she looked to him at ten years of age. Her dress was stained with food spots, her rouge was heavy on one side, her lipstick was crooked, and her fake pearls did not go with her dress. She sat at the table as they ate together. The aunt began to cry. "I have nothing left to live for. I might as well die." She started to cry as she kept chewing her food. "I'll bet that if I died tomorrow, no one would even come to my funeral, not even you folks." Garrison, seeking to be helpful at ten years of age, said, "Oh, I'd come. I'd be glad to come to your funeral." Reflecting on her outburst, Keillor concludes as he thinks back forty years: "Every tear that poor woman cried, we will cry also before we leave this world and give in to the one death we owe."

A rabbinical student came to love one of his teachers so much that he finally told the rabbi, "I love you, Rabbi!" The reply was swift. "How can you love me unless you know what hurts me?" We find in time that to know truly and be bound to one another is to be open to and share what hurts the other.

Jesus invites us toward Jerusalem to FACE OUR PAIN RATHER THAN RUN FROM IT. It is the only way we can get home, and the way we would most like to avoid.

On this Sunday we remember the Three Wiseman, who celebrate the light of Christ being spread into the world. **On this day, it is a good time for us to make friends with "THE SMALL VICTORIES THAT WILL BE OURS" rather than think that "BIG DEALS" are what we should strive for in this life.**

Also, on this day, it is good for us to take a Mother Teresa 101 courses. (3) Things she Shared will help Us.

The first Came from a time: she came to her Bishop and asked that he create an order for her to lead that would take care of dying people on the streets. He asked her how much money she had. She pulled out two cents. He said that she could not build an order on two cents. She said, **"With God and two cents you can do anything."** With this VISION she won her SMALL VICTORY and was able to paint her VISION and gained permission to paint her vision of *"love for a dying world."*

The second Came When: just after she won the Nobel Peace Prize. She announced to the world: *"There are no big deals anymore. Only many small things to be done with great love."* **The third thing** that Mother Teresa said which helps us in our downward mobility still find a way to SERVE CHRIST is this... *"Don't think that by your little acts of kindness that you are going to change the world, however it is so important that you do them."*

In the story, you have heard many times, Loren, follows the spirit of Mother Teresa in his description of the star-thrower. The star-thrower knows the power of small victories. The star-thrower is the man on the beach who is faced by millions of starfish washed ashore that will die in the day if they are not thrown back in. A man at breakfast watches from a distance as another man carefully throws some back, one at a *time*. ***He walks to the beach to talk to the star-thrower and asks him what he is doing. The reply dwells on the obvious. "I am throwing the starfish back in so they can live."*** The observer, in his cynicism says, *"You don't think this will make a difference, do you?"* The star-thrower holds up one starfish and says, *"It makes a difference to this one."* And he throws it in the ocean.

When Jesus asked us to let our light shine before all people, I am sure he did not have a lighthouse in mind, but simple everyday acts of kindness to be done in his name, most of which are given anonymously.

When I lived in Columbus, Ohio, I was most impressed by the stories of two women who knew the meaning of small victories. Both lived in poor communities and wanted to make a contribution. The first lady had a vision of helping the kids in the neighborhood. She said the vision that came to her was God instructing her to back her car out of the garage. She did. Next she decided that the open room in the garage could be made into a place to teach and nurture the neighborhood children. She invited them in, taught them about God and self-esteem, and nurtured their reading and writing abilities. Many years later those young people come back from leading successful lives and proclaim that the difference was in this wonderful woman who backed her car out of the garage and gave her love to kids who needed it. The other woman not far away wanted to feed the homeless in the neighborhood and could not get a permit from the city. Watching the people needing food daily, she decided to go the way of the Nike slogan and "Just Do It." The city said she could not feed people out of the front of the house, so she set up benches in the backyard and fed 150 people a day. When the city called, she said that it was not breaking the law: "These people are not homeless people or clients; they are my family. I always feed my family in the backyard of my home." And the city left her alone. She knew the different way that Jesus calls, the way of small victories done quietly in his name.

Someone said, "Life is what happens to you when you make other plans." Jesus says that life begins by taking a different way home than the world teaches. **Jesus shows us that BY KNEELING BEFORE HIM, HE PROVIDES US NEW DIRECTIONS.** That **new direction** includes facing the inevitable **PAINS IN LIFE** and developing a theology of **SMALL VICTORIES** as we give ourselves to what God needs done next.

The way of Jesus is a longer way than we anticipated traveling and is most often on a road that we would not have chosen had we known where it was going. And the end of the journey is to discover that the redirected way of life that Jesus calls us to is, in fact, ***FILLED WITH miles that bring blessing.***

To walk the way of Jesus is to KNEEL BEFORE HIM WITH...empty hands, not with the words "give me," but with the humble prayer that begins, "make me." At that moment Christ sets us on paths we would never have chosen. At the end of life, we discover that his redirected paths are the ones we would have chosen in the first place—HAD WE KNOWN. Had we known that the human family is blessed by facing pain rather than running from it, and had we known that the deepest joy of all is in the small shafts of light we can shed on a suffering world, we would have gladly chosen the DIRECTION of the Christ!! **FOLK, IT'S A NEW YEAR. ALLOW JESUS TO "RE-DIRECT" AND LEAD YOU ON PATHS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE AND CHANGE THE LIVES OF OTHERS THROUGH THE "SMALL VICTORIES YOU WIN TOGETHER. REMEMBER, KNEELING BEFORE JESUS PROVIDES YOUR LIFE WITH A NEW DIRECTION. Let us follow the DIRECTION OF THE "Wisemen."** Amen.