

Several years ago when I moved into my new rectory, I found a prayer from Thomas Merton which had been taped to the mirror by the previous occupant. This prayer begins by saying, “O Lord God, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, and I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.”

This prayer came back to my mind as I was reflecting on today’s Gospel. In His farewell discourse during the Last Supper, Jesus tells His Apostles, “Where I am going, you know the way.” Thomas is confused and immediately challenges Jesus’ teaching. “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” In other words, Thomas is saying “even after all of this time following you, there is still so much that we do not know. We are constantly being surprised by you so how can you expect us to know where we are going?” Like Merton said in his prayer, “[We] cannot see the road ahead of [us], and [we] cannot know for certain where it will end.” So, how in the world can you expect us to know the way?

Jesus responds to Thomas’ confusion by saying, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In other words, Jesus is in effect saying, “you know the way because the only way to the Father is to pick up your cross and follow after me. As long as you continue to seek to follow me with all of your whole heart and all of your mind and all of your strength, then you will always be on the way. While it is true that you will never know for sure where I am taking you, as long as you seek to follow me I will get you to where you need to go.” The next words in Merton’s prayer highlight this truth when he says, “I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire to please you. And I know that if I do this You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.”

This is why Jesus could confidently tell the Apostles, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” Even when we find ourselves walking through darkness and think that we are lost, we have nothing to fear as long as we are following Christ... as long as our greatest desire is to try to live according to the way of life that He has taught us. If we are doing this then we will have nothing to fear because as long as we are always seeking God, He will always continue to bless us and guide us along the right path even if we do not know what that is or where it will lead us.

We see this truth lived out in a particular way in the life of the early Church. For the past few weeks, the first readings have been a continuous reading of the Acts of the Apostles, telling us the story of the formation of the early Christian community after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. At first, it seemed like everything was going wrong for the first disciples. Jesus was killed and they had to go into hiding out of fear that they themselves would be killed as well. Eventually the persecutions became so bad that most of the disciples had to flee Jerusalem, and they were scattered across the entire known world. And yet, despite this persecution, they continued to preach and teach about Jesus as they lived their faith out together as a community.

Over time, they began noticing something amazing. Despite the struggles and the adversities facing them, other people began to come to believe in Jesus as well. And the infant Church slowly began to grow and thrive, so much so that as we saw in today’s first reading they had to begin to ordain even more ministers to go forth and tend to the needs of the faithful. Even though they had thought that they were lost and scattered in the darkness, their desire to follow Jesus had kept them on the right way the entire time even though they hadn’t always realized it.

In reflecting on all of this, I think that it is easy to apply this lesson to our lives today. As we walk through the confusion and chaos of our present days, it is easy to connect with the opening words of Merton's prayer when he says, "O Lord God, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end." And yet, despite the fact that we are walking blindly by faith, we can take comfort in the fact that we don't need to know for certain where all of this will end when we place our faith in Jesus and follow after Him. The only thing that we need to know and believe is that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.

When we truly know and believe this, then we can be at peace no matter what is going on around us because we can always trust that God is guiding us even if we do not see it. In return, all God asks of us is that we follow Him to the best of our ability, living our lives in the way that He has taught us and desiring to please Him in everything we do. When we do this, then as Merton said, "[God] will lead [us] by the right road even though [we] may know nothing about it." It is only later on when we look back that we will finally be able to see the amazing things that God has accomplished in our lives.

And so, with this newfound trust that Christ truly is the way and the truth and the life and that as long as we seek to follow Him, He will always lead us through the darkness to His glorious light, we too can confidently pray the closing words of Merton's prayer when he says, "Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadows of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to make my journey alone. Amen."