



SIEBENQUELL

Reflection on Luke 9, 57-62

The Curse of the Rear-view Mirror



SOURCE: CARMEN KIMM 2011

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, »I will follow you wherever you go.«
And Jesus said to him, »Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.«

To another he said, »Follow me.«

But he said, »Lord, first let me go and bury my father.«

But Jesus said to him, »Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.«

Another said, »I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.«

Jesus said to him, »No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.«

Anyone who wishes to drive a car knows a basic truth. You need to have a windshield as well as a rear view mirror. But it is also vital to know, that you should use the windshield more than the rear view mirror. Otherwise, you end up never getting anywhere. A heart that is only concerned with what it has left behind has fallen under the curse of the rear view mirror.

Such a heart is a curse for every vocation, be it to marriage, the priesthood or to consecrated life. Such a heart will always be obsessed with that which it might have chosen, always at the cost of that which it actually has chosen.

This leads to a bizarre and precarious moment in a spiritual life. Always fixated on what it has not actually chosen, the human heart comes to an hour in which it is filled with a false regret. The affected person becomes convinced that they have given up something extraordinarily wonderful, but it is nothing more than a fiction and a fantasy. In reality, we have lost nothing at all; not one, single, solitary thing.

But that does not prevent the false regret from arising. As humans, we have a penchant for weaving magnificent dreams, without any regard for the cold, hard fact, that we have never had any of these things within our hands. We have left possibilities behind, not possessions. We lost nothing solid, real or authentic. What we did not choose, we cannot actually claim to have lost.

As wonderful as it is to dream, the world of fantasy has some powerful drawbacks. In our fantasies, we can form the world into any shape of our choosing. It will always look exactly as we want it to look. We are unfettered and unburdened by reality. The true nature of life does not hinder us and we can write the story in any way that suits us. We can simply omit anything that is pesky, irritating or unpleasant.

In other words, we remove everything from the story which makes for vocation in real life. Fantasy makes no demands on us, while vocation demands everything of us. No deed, no action is necessary when we dream. But our calling demands great deeds and constant action; they are, in fact, the oxygen which vocation breathes. In fantasy worlds no sacrifice must be made, but no vocation can survive without the price of sacrifice.

In our dream worlds we do not have to deal with the cost of single minded dedication and no painful choices have to be made. Renunciation plays no major role in our dreams. Selfless service and self-giving are not mandatory parts of fantasy. But which vocation can thrive without them? These are realities, but only when we live in the here and now of our calling.

It reminds me of a young man who approached me shortly before his ordination to the diaconate. He announced that he was leaving. When I asked him why, he told me that he was not able to live a celibate life. I was sad for him, but I could accept this as a legitimate reason to change his mind. But then he added another line, and immediately the warning bells sounded in the back of my mind. The line was as follows: "I constantly have to think about what I left behind."

I pounced on the line, and asked him to specify what exactly he had left behind. His answer was telling. "Erik, I could have had a lovely wife, three wonderful children, a house with a white picket fence, and a pet dog." (I kid you not!!)

Then I offered him my version. "Maybe! It is also possible that you would have married a wretch of a woman, had three juvenile delinquents as children, lived in a hovel by the railroad tracks and had rats as pets."

Immediately he started to laugh at me and told me that my version was ridiculous. I replied, "You are absolutely right. My version is totally ridiculous. But is not one bit more ridiculous than your version. They are both the products of pure fantasy."

And now I leave you with those most dreaded of all words from storytellers, »to be continued«.

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