



*Roofless Church, New Albany IN  
Philip Johnson, Architect, 1960*

***The Lord is my shepherd...  
He guides me in right paths for His name's sake.  
Even though I walk in the dark valley,  
I fear no evil; for you are at my side. (Psalm 23)***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

This is being written on the Third Sunday of Easter, with a homilist's eye on the Fourth Sunday of Easter. In other words, the lenses are Disciples on the Road to Emmaus, as well as The Good Shepherd guiding His flock, by way of earthly pastures, to a heavenly pasture. The Church is in motion, we are not standing still, we have not arrived. We are called to dwell in the House of the Lord forever, knowing full well that this Vale of Tears is not that place.

This Vale of Tears, indeed. In this Archdiocese we have been in a suspended state for forty days now – since March 17<sup>th</sup> - with a good probability that the suspension of public worship and the cessation of so much of the Church's familiar pastoral activity will be extended. We'll know later this week, I'm told. (As noted above, I began drafting this reflection on Sunday; on Tuesday we received notice that the suspension of public worship has been extended through Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>.) But even with any further extension of the present suspension of activities, we've clearly begun to think, and talk, about returning to "something."

I'll leave the matter of "when" to others to decide. What I would like to reflect upon here is the "where." Where is that "something" to which we hope to return? Is it picking up where we would have on the morning of Tuesday, March 17, 2020, as if all that has happened hadn't? And all we need to do is resume the same activity in the same way – assuring ourselves that "we've always done it this way?" Or are we talking about returning to the "road" experience of those Disciples? Are we ready to have the Good Shepherd guide us to unfamiliar pastures, trusting He knows what He's doing on our behalf, for us and for our salvation?

You see, if the Gospel really is normative for us, we are still on the road; we are still moving forward; we are still being led. And that includes, I would think, how we, as Church, live our faithful response to the Good Shepherd's call. Because we are in the Communion of Saints, we can never forget, or dismiss, or minimize, the past. To do any of these is to "dis-able" our ability to make a faithful response now. But to live in the past, to absolutize the past, to mimic the past – whether forty-one days ago or forty-one generations ago (somewhere around the time of Emperor Constantine) – is to commodify the past, and thereby trivialize it. Learn from the past we must...in order to live today, into tomorrow, toward the future's horizon.

So, when we get the "go-ahead," the "green light," to end our "stays at home," our "shelterings in place," where will we want to be? Where are we being called? Docile before our Tradition and faithful to it, responsive to the Good Shepherd's summons to follow Him into our future, honoring and reverencing (rather than protesting and discrediting) all the recent efforts to serve the common good, and assuring that no death has been in vain, what will we be like? Far more directly, will we have learned anything at all from what is now happening? And will we allow this hard-earned learning renew us?

How will our experience of Covid-19 shape how we are Church? To put that in a Paschal way, how does the reality of suffering and death open up to resurrection living? In the Gospel of the Good Shepherd, those that are His know Him, hear Him, follow Him. He is the Crucified and Risen One.

Isn't the very reason for the Church's existence to proclaim the Crucified and Risen One, and to call all to Him? But isn't it also true that more often than not we get stuck in a "we've always done it this way" mindset – effectively displaying, before a waiting and as yet-undecided world, that we're not convinced (nor convincing) with our lives and our living that comfort zones are to grow beyond, that daily dying to self can, and should, be embraced.

I am not arguing change for change's sake, but for goodness' sake, the entire world these past few months has been brought face to face with death to an extent it hasn't for seventy-five years. Responsible governments and societies ought to come back changed from the experience. A faithful and responsible Church, if following its Good Shepherd, will lead the way by our own willingness to learn and change and grow. Will we? Or will we insist on getting back to the ways we've always done things...and deny the Resurrection, because we choose not to face death?

Even though we walk in the dark valley...the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls shows us the path. To abundant life. And an everlasting dwelling place.

Continued Easter Blessings,  
Fr. Grogan