Faith's Journey: An Encounter and a Response

In coming weeks, we'll be celebrating some wonderful events at our parish, namely the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation. We'll have two confirmation Masses to account for distancing and to make it easier for families to attend, and are honored to have both Archbishop Hebda and Bishop Cozzens coming for these Masses. I'll be celebrating a special First Communion Mass too in early May.

On the one hand these are great milestones. There's an appropriate celebration that comes with them. And I'm sure many photos will be taken.

However, it's more than photos too. One of the things I remember Archbishop Flynn saying at a confirmation Mass was that "this is not just a photo op." And his point is that the moment reminds us that faith is a journey, and one that requires a response.

During the Octave of Easter, the reading on Easter Wednesday was the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Our Gospel today picks up after the disciples have come to recognize Jesus. In the preceding verses, they are dejected and Jesus journeys with them but they do not know it is him. Then in the breaking of the bread they realize it is Him, but then he vanishes and they realize it was Him. And last weekend, we were reminded that we are sent, hearing "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" in the Gospel.

What First Communion and Confirmation remind us of is that our faith is a journey. But we need to also see Jesus, and bring Him to the world.

"Deism" is a school of thought that there is a God but He's not much involved in the world. He created it like a watchmaker, but that's the extent of His involvement in the world. There are probably a number of Deists in the world, but hopefully we as Catholics understand that Jesus is always with us. Where? The Eucharist, for one.

For those of us who have already celebrated it, our First Communion was the first of many moments where we received Jesus at Mass. We find Him by remembering that His love is always with us through so many other ways too, such as when we pray and when we celebrate the sacraments. We will meet Him face to face one day, but until that moment, we do not journey through life alone. Bishop Cozzens, though he hasn't given me a preview of his homily, I remember would have a favorite Confirmation homily he tells where he had let his faith become lukewarm a bit in college and then saw a crucifix in a cemetery where he realized God's love in a profound way that caused him to get more serious about his faith. God has all kinds of ways of bursting into our lives. So we need to let Him in by looking for Him and remembering we are never alone. With respect to the Eucharist, hopefully we never take it for granted, and realize how significant it is to receive Communion; not just a representation but the Body of Christ, who wants to give us Himself again on our altar and be with us as food for our journey. Hopefully this also transforms us too and sets our faith on fire. In our reading from Monday's mass last week, there was a verse in Acts of the Apostles that said: "As they

prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31). Sometimes sports stadiums shake with excitement. But wouldn't it be a great thing if we got as excited about winning a game as we did about our faith? Mindful that Jesus gives Himself to us, we hopefully grow closer to Him in grace and holiness.

We then remember too that we are sent. One of the things I try to do as a priest is to remind people of the saying that sometimes we are the only Bible people will ever read. Think for a minute about how people prepare for First Communion and Confirmation; they are helped along that journey by their sponsors and by catechists who reveal the faith to them. By being involved in the lives of others, by talking about our faith in words and actions, and applying what our faith teaches about morals and the dignity of the human person we can do so much to evangelize.

As I shared last week and as we hear about in the longer version of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, there are many tough spots on our faith journey too. Sometimes God can feel far away; certainly with so much of what has gone in in the world and the evil we see, and the suffering we endure, it can feel that way at times. But the disciples keep on walking through the night, that leads to them finally realizing Jesus was with them. We too must remember Jesus is with us too step by step. Remember, just because we might not feel the closeness of God at times does not mean He is not there with us every step of the way.

Faith is indeed a journey - it can't stop with Confirmation. We can't get sidetracked into thinking our final destination is our career, and sometimes our world revolves around a schedule, our kids sports teams, the busyness of life, when it really needs to revolve around God. Like the disciples, may our eyes be opened to His presence, and like them, may we help others to see His presence too in their lives and in our world.

God bless,

Fr. Paul