

Homily for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul
St. Joseph's Neier June 28-29, 2014
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Central Idea: In the travels of St. Paul we see what we need for our journey of Life.

*The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom.*

Traveling, as much as I like to do it, can be very painful. There's a lot of "Hurry up and Wait." There's a lot of "Did I remember to bring all my stuff?" And there is a fair amount of "Where am I?" As I have mentioned to you a few times, the word "travel" comes from the same root as the word "travail." In other words, if you are going to travel, you can almost assuredly expect to suffer.

My travels are nothing compared to what St. Paul encountered on his missionary journeys. I cannot even imagine what he faced as he traveled the Mediterranean and as he eventually made his way to the center of the world, Rome. Caesar's Palace is easier to get to in Vegas. Paul talks of shipwrecks, imprisonment, beatings, and the new Testament has a few very teary goodbye's as Paul leaves beloved places never to return. There is no texting or email or Facebook or Twitter in the ancient world, and so the departures are total and absolute.

I believe travel is a great metaphor for our lives. There are certain truths that come out as we travel. We discover something about our true selves, our real spirituality and our authentic relationship with God. I am certain that Paul did as well as he made his way around.

Three quick travel spirituality lessons.

1. Taking care of oneself is not an option, nor is it selfish. If you have ever been on a plane you have heard the spiel. How to put on a seat belt (which I mastered at the age of 4.) Where the life vests and floatation devices are in the event of a water landing. (God forbid.) But my favorite bit of advice is what they tell you in the unlikely event of loss of cabin pressure. Oxygen masks will fall and, this is the important part, you must put your ***own mask on first*** and then put it on a child. It sounds counter-intuitive. Our culture tells us that you should always put your children first, but this is not necessarily true. Legitimate self interest is not about being egotistical or being selfish. Instead, it reminds me of a telling line from an old Billy Joel song, "do what's good for you or you're no good for anybody." Now you can take this to an extreme, and that is not good, however if I don't take care of myself, if I am not living a healthy life, if I am doing things for others to the detriment of my own healthy and sanity, I am not doing this parish, my school, or anyone I deal with any favors.

2. Pack smart, pack light. Back in the ancient world, it was best to travel light. That is why Jesus told his disciples not to have a whole lot with them as they made their way. Walk through the airport and you can see the rookies. They are the ones lugging lots of stuff, three or four different bags, standing in long lines, not sure about the TSA. I have learned to pack lighter, pack smarter. I don't put things in my carryon that will get monitored by the TSA. So it is for life. I think a lot of people go through life with way too much baggage. There is a truth about all of our lives: we came into the world with nothing and we will exit the world with nothing. In traveling, it is important to bring only the things that are essential, and even some essentials can be gotten along the way. What is it that you need to let go as you make your way through your life. That hurt that happened long ago is just using space in your life. It is tough to lug around. And what on earth are you going to use it for? One of the things that I talk to engaged couples about in preparing for marriage are their past hurts. Honestly, you have to confront them, deal with them and let them heal. But ultimately, you have to put those hurts far behind you. If you don't you will be limping through your life journey dragging that stuff. Some people find a twisted pleasure in those things. Good luck with that. And that baggage gets heavier and heavier the longer it remains. In the words of Elsa in Frozen, Let it Go. Let it Go. Let it Go.

3. Have a plan, but don't be a slave to it. St. Paul knew where he was going, but he could never have known where it would actually lead him. When you travel, it is important to have a destination and a plan about how to get there. However, the best things on a journey are often those things unforeseen, unplanned, serendipitous. Often when some people are traveling, they are so focused on the plan, so focused on what is next, that they miss the beauty, miss the wonder. Don't get me wrong, wandering aimlessly through life is sounds appealing, but it is a recipe for disaster. (the next joke is in honor of the World Cup) You have to have a goooooooooo! in life and you need to have the wherewithal to figure out how to get there. But those plans are liable to adapt, to change, to alter. Have a plan, but don't be so wrapped up in it that you miss where God is leading you.

Paul's missionary journeys simply changed the world. Little did he know when he was finally martyred in Rome that all the hassle, all the suffering, all the pain, all the hardship would transform not only the world and age in which he traveled, but the entire world down to our era. He trusted in the Lord to lead him to his Heavenly destination.

So, too with us, on our travels of life. You have no idea how your wandering on this planet can change, can transform, can encourage those you have contact with and even beyond. Your travails, your travels, the hardships you face as you make your way, can have meaning if you only trust in the Lord who will lead you to your ultimate, eternal destination.