



Thoughts on the Journey

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Immaculate Conception Academy is a boarding school for girls that is situated in the small town of Oldenburg, Indiana, about an hours drive northwest of Cincinnati. It is run by the Sisters of St. Francis and it is where I attended high school. I was fortunate to have this experience in my life, because it taught me how to live with other people from all walks of life.

The sisters ran a tight ship (so-to-speak); but, with that many teenage girls living together, there had to be order and discipline. The morning bell went off every day at 5:30 a.m. which gave us time to get dressed and get to Mass with the other sisters at the motherhouse. It was not an elective, Mass was non-negotiable.

Just as most high schools go, there were a few cliques but, for the most part, we managed to get along and co-exist without too many issues. That is, until the middle of my sophomore year when a new girl arrived at the academy.

Tina was a stand-out from the moment she walked in the door. She was immature for her age and her behavior, at best, could be labeled as “odd.” She carried a stuffed animal around with her and would periodically talk like a baby. It didn’t help that she had an extra toe on one foot. In a regular high school, that wouldn’t have been a problem. However, at a boarding school, where you see people’s feet in the shower, it quickly spread and added to her oddity.

For we girls who attended Mass every day, we certainly missed the concept that we were to be Christ-like. Tina was bullied and made fun of frequently. As a new student, she was not shown hospitality and acceptance, but rather was treated like an outcast. The only exception to that scenario was another student who had similar

characteristics as Tina.

In Mark’s gospel this week, Jesus is speaking to a crowd of three different audiences: a group of scribes and Pharisees, the crowd that usually follows Him, and the disciples. When the Pharisees question Jesus about defilement and the lack of ritual cleansing and purity, Jesus responds,

“Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.*”

Let’s face it, even though Jesus followed Mosaic law and listened to prophets past, His main focus wasn’t the laws of the matter, He was focused on the heart of the matter—how God wants us to be *religious*. Jesus talks about the evil within: evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. In a word, “sin.”

Looking back on the episodes with Tina, we were bullies. Instead of meeting her where she was like Jesus would have done, we behaved like hypocrites. We went to Mass at the crack of dawn and by noon we had annihilated this girl with our maliciousness and vile thoughts. It all speaks to Jesus’ message about the things from within that defile our Christian dignity and cause great harm to those who are in the path of our sinfulness. I think of Tina every once in awhile and pray for her healing and for mine.