

Too Much Baggage.

Take nothing for your journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in your belts.

I was reminded of my first time going to El Salvador and one of the great lessons of my life. The parish of St. Dominic had adopted a sister parish. It is a wonderful ministry, where the pastor asked us after the war, to “teach his children to sing again.” And so we sent recorders and they began a choir, which led to sending guitars, which led to a bigger choir, to sending them two cargo containers of band instruments, which led to the first children’s orchestra in El Salvador. I had just become the new pastor; it was time to pay them a visit. And so I went down, loaded for any eventuality. Bug spray, Malaria pills, antibiotics, diarrhea medications, bandages, you name it I had it. We were also told to bring the ends of the towel paper rolls, to bring into the bush, in case they were needed. I brought a half dozen with me. And so I spent two weeks with the people of our sister parish and thought I was handling the extreme poverty pretty well.

At the end of my time there I decided that I could take nothing back with me. And so I gave everything in my suitcase away, except my Birkenstock sandals. (A scriptural reference of today, I was not aware of then.) I had about 6 partial rolls of toilet paper and asked the pastor, if he wanted these thinking he would use them in his own bathroom. He answered with great enthusiasm “Oh yes! When our senior citizens meet next, we will give them out as door prizes!” It was at that moment that I finally lost control. “OMG, I have everything and they have nothing”

I was a changed person, when it came to possessions and just being so very thankful of the bounty I have. And how I have so much and others have so very little.

Two years ago, I traveled to India and made a pilgrimage to Goa, the place where St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit, not Seelos, the Redemptorist, is buried.

This Jesuit who had converted thousands of men and women in India, Japan and China, when asked how he had touched so many people, simply said: “I travel light, so I have time. Any distance shorter than twenty miles, I walk, so I have time.”

Traveling light is a hard thing to do and accomplish, like you I have a house full of stuff and memories, keep sakes that I have accumulated on my many journeys.

Quite a different scenario from the one presented in Mark's Gospel. Jesus sent the disciples out, two by two, with nothing for the journey but a walking stick—**no food, no traveling bag, not a coin in their purses. Sandals were proper, but no second tunic.**

I realize, of course, that we are in a different time. And it is appropriate to take things on our journey to help us in our efforts of healing, blessing, anointing, and preaching. But **it is baggage that we carry. More often than not, the excess baggage hinders rather than helps.**

We Christians—professional religious and laity alike—are all called to be disciples, often as healers and teachers, sometimes as reluctant prophets like Amos. But I wonder if we carry too much baggage.

It's not merely the things we stuff in our luggage or carry along with our entourage. It may be all the excess trappings of our power, privilege, and money. It may be an unbending ideology or belief.

The irony of these words do not escape me, as I am talking about lightening the load of excess baggage on one hand and acquiring a new multi-million dollar building and a wish list of stuff on the other. But even in the irony is a lesson. I have never felt freer as a priest in not being responsible for a building. It has been a luxury and a pleasure to be only concerned about the foundation of a community and not the foundation of a building. And I have said it more than once, the only reason to have a building in my mind is for our children, for the education of our youth and to have a place to gather our teens.

**A Christian, whether pope or peasant, is most effective in discipleship when we can identify our motives for acting.** To be reminded that we are to be healer and prophets by our baptism to bring good news to poor. It is so very important to remember our call and commission, because it can be so tempting to serve the good news of our own egos and importance, rather than serving the truths we preach.

If we profess that “it is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven,” then perhaps our lives could be lived a little more simply, a thoughtfully regarding those things we carry and hold so tightly on to. It might be more evident to others and ourselves that it is indeed Christ we are made for, not the trappings we carry.

With too much baggage, it is our baggage we serve, our own nests we feather. Could this be why some of our apostolic efforts in the world today seem ineffective? Could it be that we are more skilled at collecting our benefits than shepherding the faith?

A question I ask myself and ask you today!