

There is one sentence in the middle of Luke's Gospel that changes his whole story. It's the first line of today's passage. Before I explain it, permit me to review with you where we are in the liturgical year.

Catholics have a lot of peculiarities, but one is that we have an elaborate calendar for feasts and seasons. Our two most important feasts, Christmas and Easter, have seasons that prepare for them and seasons that finish them off. Three weeks ago we finished Easter with Pentecost Sunday. Then we had a couple special feast days, Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi. So today, having celebrated all the feasts and seasons we know how to celebrate we return to that ho-hum season we call Ordinary Time. When we hit Ordinary Time we open up one of the Gospels and we start reading it chunk by chunk for about five months.

This year the Gospel is Luke and as it happens the text for today begins at the end of chapter 9, which is the pivotal sentence for Luke. The first part of his Gospel relates various episodes in the life of Jesus, but the entire second half of the Gospel you might say concerns one event. And fittingly enough for summer, that event is a trip. Jesus takes a journey to Jerusalem where he will die. Not your average vacation. But this trip from Gallilee to Jerusalem is the literary framework on which Luke hangs all the stories, sayings, and parables of Jesus that we'll hear every Sunday from now till November.

Let me read for you the sentence I've been referring to: "As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken from this world, he firmly resolved to proceed toward Jerusalem." The original Greek says he "set his face" toward Jerusalem. So from this verse we know the time has come, the journey has begun, and Jesus begins his journey firmly resolved with his face set on the city of his death.

But just as he is set on going forward his disciples are set on going back. One wants to have a home; another wants to bury the dead; a third wants to say goodbye to family. And Jesus says no, we can't look back any more.

Jesus knows that often it's the past that keeps us from accepting the present and moving on to the future. Often it's in the past that we had the security we long to have again. Or it's in the past where hurts are so deep that we cannot envision being happy ever again. The past can trap us.

When Jesus turns to Jerusalem he invites his disciples to set their faces away from their securities and troubles and on to their destiny. He says it's OK to let go of whatever holds us back, and let's move on.

Luke chapter 9, verse 51 is the pivotal moment in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus invites us this Ordinary Time to leave the past behind and join him on this extraordinary journey, where we will find life and hope.