

I have personally known a parishioner, Hannah Voets, 70, who has been gracefully active all her life, leaving an irrepressible smile with everyone. Just a few months ago she was hospitalized with internal bleeding. Further testing and examination revealed that she had Stage 4 ovarian cancer. Her immediate reaction was, "Here we go God, it's all yours." Since that moment, she has been sticking to her treatments and relentlessly staying the course. She never said, "why me and why now," but continues to smile saying, "God is at work." The reward of her patient endurance and her ability to stay the course cheerfully have brought her untold joy and confidence. Even as she goes through the ordeal of the treatment process, she brims with joy.

The women of the gospels show us the perfect way forward, with Mary as the prominent figure who stood by Jesus. The Constitutions of the Congregation (8:120) contemplate this accurately, stating, "There stood by the cross of Jesus his mother Mary, who knew grief and was a Lady of Sorrows. She is our special patroness, a woman who bore much she could not understand and who stood fast. To Her many sons and daughters, whose devotions ought to bring them often to her side, she tells much of this daily cross and its daily hope." Like Mary, the other women too walked with Jesus,

relentlessly recognizing and believing deep within their bones that Jesus was God walking amidst them. They were totally immersed in the Passion of Jesus and so were able to rejoice in His Resurrection. Enduring hardship and going through the difficult patches of our lives with cheerfulness will be a necessary way to reap the reward. Paul and Barnabas kept encouraging their listeners saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14: 22) The journey itself can be a work of resurrection and redemption.

So true is the proverb that reassures us that if we stand with Him tenaciously, that itself would bring its proper reward. "The Journey is the Reward"... Stay the Course... Stick with Him at All Times... Reap the Reward.

Be Blessed!

Rev. John Antony Britto, C.S.C., initially joined the Brothers of Holy Cross in South India in 1984 and made his final profession of vows in December 1990. Fr. John holds a B.A. in Sociology from Annamalai University in Chidambaram and a M.A. in English from Loyola College, Madras University in Chennai. He also studied Philosophy and Theology at the esteemed Pontifical University of Jnana Deepa Vidya Peeth (J.D.V.) in Pune, India and later earned a B.Ed. in English, a M.Ed. in Education from Annamalai University and a M.Phil. from Periyar University, Salem, India. In 2009, Fr. John's desire to seek ordination culminated in his joining the former Eastern Province of Priests and Brothers in the United States where he was assigned to study in the Theology Department at the University of Notre Dame. He was ordained to the transitional diaconate in September 2010 in Bennington, Vt., and ordained to the priesthood at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Notre Dame, in 2011.



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Office of Development
P.O. Box 765, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0765
www.holycrossusa.org
development@holycrossusa.org



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The Journey is the Reward

Fr. John Britto Antony, C.S.C.

Being immersed in the message of the indispensability of the cross during the Lenten Season and then experiencing the joy of the Resurrection inevitably brought to mind the important and crucial aspect of staying the course or taking the journey in all its seriousness. Living the 40 grace-filled days of Lent in its fullness and heart wrenching and faith-anchoring celebrations of the Triduum makes Easter a very breathtaking moment not only in the life of the Church but for everyone. This year's celebration of Easter made a tremendous impact on me as never before.

My contention therefore is that if we short circuit the process of staying the course or relishing the journey, the end result will not be as significant as when we go through the ordeal of each step. A Chinese proverb says "The Journey is the Reward." It brings to mind one of the eloquent statements given in The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross which states, "If we shirk the cross, gone too will be our hope." (8: 121) Our Christian life is often described as a pilgrimage or a journey to the Father's Land of glory. The late Passionist priest and renowned scripture scholar, Carroll Stuhlmueller, wrote, "We are always on the way, seeking and looking beyond where we are, following a hope." As Christians, our hope lies in Jesus Christ.



Jesus Himself puts forth this invitation, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24) How can we participate in the journey even if it is difficult? To the extent we have been faithfully journeying, and participating in the passion of Jesus Christ, we would share in the glory of Easter - that singular moment

that gave meaning to our existence as Christians. From my own experience, I know that not all of us are committed wholeheartedly to this journey and walk with Jesus and thereby not all of us stay the course to reap the reward that this journey promises. We see this constantly portrayed in all walks of life, be it the vocation to married life or religious life or priesthood. The more we are committed to the journey, the more rewarding it is for us.

We see this clearly in the Passion Narrative. The men among the disciples lost faith during Jesus' passion and predictably it was reflected during the Easter morning too. Were they too confused, baffled, confounded and shocked or were they not present with all their hearts? When the ultimate challenge came, they wilted away miserably. That this still is our story when faced with challenges to our faith, but to those who persevere until the end, the reward is unparalleled. We should be like the bold and faithful women who stood by the cross and with limitless optimism went to the tomb of Jesus and believed in His resurrection.

Like the two broken-hearted disciples on the road to Emmaus who fled that horrible scene of torture and death, our attitude too is to flee the challenging and testing times to our Church and our

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(Matthew 16:24)

faith. Perhaps, at times like these, we are tempted to leave the Church or reduce our participation in protest - failing miserably to trust in God. We are, at best, only the tools. It is the God of Abraham, Noah, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, and Mary and Joseph, that makes Resurrection happen in the life of the Church.

Somehow, we are implacably opposed to enduring hardship, avoiding circumstances that are laborious and painful and rather seek shortcuts to the victory stand. Wanting instant health cures, bypassing lawful admission processes, and seeking divorce rather than living by the sacred vows we made. But for those of us who stay the course, the joy is indescribable.