

Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen

Homily, Aug. 10 and 11, 1991

St. James Cathedral

I have sometimes thought that the Bible was written as much by travel agents as prophets and evangelists. In the scriptures, it seems that people are constantly on the move, on a journey, heading off to some strange new place. And frequently enough, they are none too sure they want to go.

I am reminded of that as we hear about poor Elijah in today's first reading from the Book of Kings. He is frightened and despairing as we meet him - and two things happen.

First, God asks him to go on a journey. But no less importantly, God presents him with this miraculous meal - food for the road, as it were. Because Elijah is willing to make the trip, he is blessed. We hear later in the chapter that he encounters the Lord in the whispering of the breeze.

Elijah's journey strikes very close to home for me today as I celebrate the Masses and preach for the last time before my retirement as Archbishop of Seattle next week.

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After I announced my resignation in June, I was able to spend some time in my home state of Montana. Though I am a converted and enthusiastic Washingtonian, there is something about going back to Montana that is almost mystical for me. Maybe it's the immensity of its mountains, or the broad sweep of the big sky, or the solitude of its wilderness. I can't exactly say. But it is a place where I have always felt very close to God.

So these last weeks have given me some time to think back and to pray over my life of nearly 70 years, the last 16 as Archbishop of Seattle. And it seems to me that one way to describe that life is as a series of journeys. Journeys I might never have chosen or even thought possible - but journeys that, just like Elijah, have brought me to meet the Lord.

For example, my journey from being a chemistry teacher and football coach to serving as bishop in Helena was one I would never have chosen for myself. I had to believe that others knew better than I. And perhaps the most important journey of my life, my journey as a new, "green" bishop to the Second Vatican Council was a journey that, I must admit, I and many others, would never have dreamed possible. Even my journey here to Seattle was one I had deep misgivings about: Was I the right person for this terribly important job?

There is something about travelling with this God of ours that makes you end up in unusual places. For me it's been places such as the steps of the capitol in Olympia and the gates of the Trident base at Bangor. But less exotic spots too, like Ballard and Battle Ground, Moclips and Mukilteo, places I am the richer for having been, places made holy by the people who live there.

As I reflect on these journeys in my life, I know that the Lord's promise to Elijah has been fulfilled in my life too. When the Lord sends you on a journey, he does not abandon you. You are provided food for the journey; you never travel alone.

What tremendous companions I've had on these journeys! I think of the late bishop of Spokane, Bernard Topel, the spiritual teacher who influenced my life more profoundly than probably anyone after my mother and father. I think of prayerful, contemplative people such as Thomas Merton and Father Richard Rohr. I think of advocates of non-violence such as Jim and Shelly Douglass. I think of my close priest friends such as your pastor, Father Ryan. I think of the ecumenical and civic leaders I've been privileged to call friends. I think of my loving and supportive family. And in these last four years, I think of my trusted friend and colleague, Archbishop Murphy. And finally, of course, I think of all of you.

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*My years as Bp. have been quite good - yes*

There have been some difficult days for me as Archbishop of Seattle. But throughout my ministry, I have never felt myself abandoned or alone. At every turn, I have experienced more support and encouragement than I can say. For such worthy companions on so interesting a journey, I can only thank the Lord. He has blessed me so richly with all of you.

If this metaphor of a journey is true of my own life, I think it is also an apt image for the life of our Church. We are <sup>of us</sup> each called to be travellers if we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

In following Jesus, we do not journey as individuals. We travel together. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that idea in referring to the Church as a people on pilgrimage. <sup>+</sup>What is a pilgrimage? Isn't it a group of people, in the company of one another, who are travelling together for a holy purpose? Our journey is a pilgrimage that has Jesus Christ as both its origin and its destination.

As I take up a new role in this pilgrimage, I look forward to being a part of our common life together as an archdiocese in whatever ways I can. I take consolation in a <sup>a prayer weekly</sup> quote from Thomas Merton which has meant a great deal to me. Merton wrote:

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end...

But I believe that the desire to please you does infact  
please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing...

And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right  
road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always.

Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I  
will not fear.

For you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to  
face my perils alone.

*my friends,*

To have shared this journey with so many of you has been such a  
blessing in my life. It is a debt I can repay only with my thanks,  
*like me* which I offer wholeheartedly. ~~With~~ With my prayers, which I promise you  
now and in the future. *of course* And with my love, which has been yours for  
some time now.

May the Lord Jesus continue to guide and direct the journey we  
all share. May the power of his spirit be yours in all you do and  
may you know the presence of God's joy, peace and love in your life. *always.*