

An Easter Vision of Life on the Royal Road

Historically, El Camino Real was any road under the jurisdiction of the Spanish king. We, of course, know El Camino Real as the 600 mile stretch of our state that marks the historic mission trail; of which our diocese geographically inhabits a portion, and for which we are named. Legend has it that the mission fathers planted the mustard seeds that produce the vibrant, yellow bushes we see this time of year along the side of the road. When I see them I am reminded of Jesus words, “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a garden. It is the smallest of all seeds, and it grows into a very large bush, and the birds of the air come and make their nests in its branches.” In other words, the kingdom of God may seem small and irrelevant, but it is not. It is vibrant, colorful, makes its presence known and is home to God’s creation. Mustard seeds were a major annoyance to farmers of the first century; no one would ever plant one intentionally in their garden, since this is hardly where one wants unintended species or an abundance of birds!

There is no denying the presence of the Kingdom of God once it is planted in the heart. You just know it when it happens. It suddenly *is*. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a once-and-for-all planting of the kingdom in the world – not to be removed. In these past weeks of Lent, Holy Week and now Easter, we have worshipped with stories of Jesus’ miracles, converting conversations, passion and resurrection, all of which called people to see life differently; something had suddenly appeared in their lives that they were not even aware had been planted. Their world view shifted as these encounters with Jesus changed their lives; and sometimes people responded by trying to uproot that which God was sowing. Think of times in your life, where seemingly out of nowhere, God suddenly *was*. Did you live more deeply into that new reality, or try to uproot it?

In January we had three excellent vision days that began as the planting of tiny seeds, and which produced many beautiful images of the kind of diocese we are, and want to become more of. Indeed, the vision days are just one of the seeds God has been scattering around this diocese over these past years; bushes are everywhere! As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ today, let us also realize and give thanks that we are in the midst of a resurrection event in this diocese.

Throughout the vision days, fear of change and risk was expressed amidst beautiful words of hope and energy. The Kingdom of God is tenacious in its sowing, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is permanent and eternal. Fear of living more deeply into our new reality may be intertwined with our future, but it is not more powerful than God. Death exists - and so does resurrection. One of the meditations that emerged from the vision days was, “what would it be like if we were to receive from God impossible dreams, persevere with them and nurture them into being?” Might we faithfully submit to living more deeply into our reality as the church, the resurrected body of Christ? I have every confidence that we have all we need to answer the call that God has planted in our midst: to be vibrant communities of deep faith, restoration and transformation.

The questions used for the Appreciative Inquiry process, the raw data and the meditations from the vision days are all online, and you may access them at [http://www.catholicdioceseofstlouis.org/faith-life/faith-life-articles/2014/04/23/faith-life-articles-2014-04-23-01](#). I encourage vestries or whole congregations to use the process we used as a diocese in order to identify the tiny seeds God may be scattering in your midst. As well, deaneries have already met in order to continue moving forward with the creativity, energy and joy so present at all three of the days. It is exciting to see what might emerge as several parishes discover the power of working together. When resurrection is taking root, the Holy Spirit is at work. It is important that we not micro-manage the seeds or the scattering, but instead receive "the impossible dreams, persevere with them and nurture them into being." The potential use of all that we wondered about in those three days is limitless. You may need to wonder about it a bit more to discover more seeds! To clergy, I have found the meditations and the raw data to be wonderful meditation aids and preaching tools. The spiritual principles woven through all our work in those three days are in line with Holy Scriptures and provide great links to this life of faith which we are called to help God illuminate.

As I have noted, the communications team will work together to utilize the language of the vision days to create a vision statement for our diocese. Again, this is not in an effort to control or micro-manage the work of the Holy Spirit by providing absolute directives from me, but to allow the richness of our time together to also feed us not only at the local level, but also to impact the overarching language of our corporate ministry.

Finally, I want to say that these vision days were never intended to be a program that would solve our problems, tell us what to do, or be a quick-fix answer to how to do church. They are rich moments in our life of wonder, grace and joy in Jesus Christ and can be mined for their treasure. The new ideas, the programming, the changes we are called to make will happen as we receive what is planted in us and have the perseverance to nurture it.

Praise to Jesus Christ, died and risen to live with us throughout all eternity. May these days of Resurrection give you complete Joy!

+Mary