

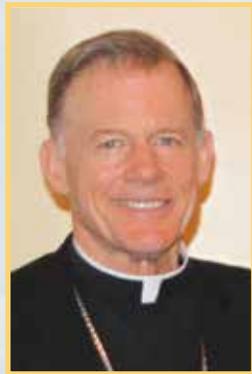
Abide in Christ

The Slow Track to Heaven

Ah, summertime, when the "livin' is easy." I always looked forward to summers when everything slowed down and the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life went into low gear. But, wait! What happened? As this summer continues to unfold, no one seems to be slowing down.

People are driving just as fast as ever on the Coors Raceway or the I-25 Indianapolis 500. As always, we seem to be jockeying for the quickest lane at the grocery store and throw our hands up in the air when we inevitably choose what turns out to be the slowest line. My friend still calls me, wondering why I have not answered the e-mail he sent to me two minutes ago. I am still having trouble waiting until the end of dinner before I whip out my smart phone to settle the dispute as to which picture won the Academy Award in 1980. (Put your phone down, it was *Kramer vs. Kramer*.) Maybe there was a time when things slowed down during summer but it seems long, long ago. Our fast-paced, digitally obsessed world is going faster and faster and our ability to "stop and smell the roses" is receding farther and farther into oblivion. We must as a people of Faith learn to be still and know the presence of God even in our chaotic and conflicted world.

This is why I believe the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, which we celebrate this August 15, offers an important lesson for all of us. Here in New Mexico, we have had a special relation to Our Lady. The oldest Marian devotion in the United States began with the arrival of Nuestra Señora de La Asunción. Brought to this land by the Friars her intercession has great



Archbishop John C. Wester

meaning for the diverse cultural membership of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Mary was assumed into heaven not because she was adept at multitasking and getting ahead of everybody else but rather because she stopped long enough to ponder the Word of God in her heart and allowed that Word to take root in her life. Luke tells us that Mary "kept all these things, and pondered

them in her heart." (Luke 2:19) She allowed for quiet time, peaceful time, down time in her life so that she could be present to the "still, small voice" of God. (1 Kings 19:12) We are at a moment as a society where we need to learn from her example and take the time to ponder, finding the stillness of our hearts to see God's mystery. Mary lived in the now moment, not in the past with guilt nor in the future with fear. This allowed her to deepen in her love of the God who first loved her. It was in this context that she became the mother of God and the mother of the Church. Through her intercession as patroness of New Mexico she continues to show us this motherly care in our cities, at our borders, in our public discourse. Moreover, it is because of her ability to slow down and to be a present to the one who abides in silence that she was assumed into heaven through the salvific work of the Son she bore in her womb. It is this Incarnate Word that she draws us to, inviting us to open our hearts to God's love. But we must take time to be still, to slow down.

This "slowing down" reminds me of a time when a dear priest friend of mine took three of us seminarians to a retreat in Sedona, Arizona. We drove

from San Francisco for 14 hours straight and were making great time when we decided to stop in the middle of the Mojave Desert at 2 a.m. Despite our desire to get to the retreat house as soon as possible and disregarding our somewhat ridiculous goal of setting a new speed record, we pulled over, stopped the car, and spent 20 minutes gazing at the incredibly bright stars and taking in the smells of the night desert. In fact, it was then that our retreat had begun. We realized that in order to arrive you must stop along the way or you will never get there. Very often the order of grace unfolds unexpectedly, in the hidden hours and moments of our day. It is counterintuitive, somewhat confusing, but true. As T.S. Eliot said in *Little Gidding*, "...What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." This gets at what Our Lord meant when he referred to himself as "the way, the truth and the life." The journey leads to Christ, it starts with Christ, it is Christ. Mary knew, as we found out in the desert, that in Jesus Christ we have already arrived. There is, therefore, no need to rush.

Yet, I confess, I do rush. I cannot seem to help it. There is so much to be done and so little time in which to do it. As Robert Frost said so trenchantly, so wistfully, "...the woods are lovely dark and deep but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep and miles to go before I sleep." Perhaps a good prayer for us this August as we celebrate the Assumption is to ask Mary to pray with us for the grace to ponder more. Pray that we might be more deeply aware of how God is present to us in every moment of our lives. It doesn't take much to realize that so many poets and pundits echo the words of Mary's Magnificat. Elizabeth Barrett Browning knew this

when she wrote, "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God, But only he who sees takes off his shoes. The rest sit round and pluck blackberries." By rushing around so much, do I miss the real goal of my life, union with God who is one with me right now? Like Mary how can I hear the Annunciation of God's voice in my spouse, my child, my parents, my loved one, when my ears are filled with the rushing winds of my fast-paced life? Am I humble enough to admit that my goals, my desires and all those things that I am rushing to achieve pale in the presence of an all loving and all merciful God who is with me in the present moment? Can I come to the humble recognition that I do not have to be the first one in line, the first one to know the answer, the first one to be recognized because God, whose love knows no bounds, has already made me number one, loving me into existence and calling me to himself for all eternity? What more could I want?

As we celebrate the Assumption this year, I am praying that we can deepen in an appreciation of the difference between what is urgent and what is important. Many of the things that occupy our attention and cause us to scurry about may be urgent but, in truth, they are often not that important. As I am talking to a dear friend over a cup of coffee, I begin to see that the ringing phone may be urgent but right now, at this moment, it is not important. Mary knew what was important. She knew that listening to God's word, trusting in that word and allowing the promise of that Word to unfold within her as she is caught up in a divine dance with God himself is all that really matters. Mary teaches us that there are no fast tracks to heaven, only slow ones that prayerfully ponder God's mysteries. We get there in due time, in Sabbath time, in God's time.

So let us all take it easy this summer and let God set the pace, echoing Mary's *fiat voluntas tua* -thy will be done.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

+ John C. Wester

Most Rev. John C. Wester,
Archbishop of Santa Fe

His Mercy
Endures Forever