

“Show Me the Way to Go Home”

Many of us have had heroes, people we look up to especially in our youth. They might have been sports stars (for me it was Sandy Koufax), or celebrities (mine was Vic Morrow), or politicians (mine was JFK), or others (I thought Pope John XXIII was a good man, but I never let my Baptist parents know). Of course, a lot of this hero worship is influenced by the media. People whose accomplishments are shown in a favorable light get a young person's attention.

More important than these idols are heroes or mentors who are close to home. These are the people who shape our lives. I am thinking of relatives, teachers, coaches, ministers and the like who make a lasting difference in our lives. My uncle Johnny Mac help me find confidence in myself when he taught me how to tie my shoes and throw a football. My maternal grandmother showed me I was loved beyond limit and without condition. My second grade teacher Miss Heron let me know what it was like to feel special. My college choir director Frank Lendrim opened me up to great music I had no idea existed.

What is common among all these people is that whatever they teach, share, or foster they point beyond themselves. Sometimes they point to something concrete and other times it is a vision that they point toward. Perhaps it is a hope or a dream they have for us as individuals, or for the society, or for the world. And so they point beyond themselves and beyond the things they teach or mentor to something transcendent.

John the Baptist is an example of that in today's Gospel. Surrounded by his disciples he sees Jesus in the distance and says, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” That is an ego free move.

If John's focus was on himself instead of God, he might have tried to keep his disciples close. But John knew that his role was to point the way to God. He preaches that he is here to prepare the way for the greater one. He tells the Pharisees he is not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals.

When Jesus comes on the scene John sends his disciples to follow him. And they do. While John's disciples may not understand who Jesus is and what he is telling them, still they follow. They follow because their teacher pointed the way. John and the best of our mentors and heroes live beyond themselves. They dream of something beyond what they know or can see.

They have dreams that may not be fulfilled in their lifetime. But it does not matter because their lives point beyond this world to a world where God's love and peace reign supreme.

They have dreams like a man who is a hero to me now, but I am sorry to say was not a hero in my childhood. This man pointed beyond himself to a

world where all are free, honored, and holy. This man said “I have a dream” and he quoted the prophet Isaiah saying, “that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.” In that same speech this man quoted my favorite biblical prophet Amos, saying our world would not be healed until, “justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

Whether it is my grandmother, the prophet Amos, John the Baptist, or Martin Luther King, Jr., these people always point beyond themselves to the seat of all that is good, true, and holy. They point to God. Because they believe the words of today’s Psalm, “Happy are they who trust in the LORD! . . . Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God! how great your wonders and your plans for us! there is none who can be compared with you.” And as Isaiah wrote God’s “salvation [will] reach to the end of the earth.”

Let us be like John using what is best in ourselves to point away from ourselves to that which is righteous, and holy, and good. Let us keep our eyes, and ears open to the one who has come into the world not to condemn the world but that all might be saved. Let us point with all our heart, mind, and spirit toward God whose love and mercy never changes. Let us point the way to our one true home in Christ Jesus our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit are one God whose love and mercy are boundless.