

Joe was asked by a neighbor to drive her son to a hospital. Although he had other things planned, Joe didn't know how to say no. He put the child in the car and started on the fifty mile journey. Suddenly the boy turned to him and shyly asked, "Are you God?" Startled, Joe said no. The boy continued, "I heard mother asking God for some way to get me to a doctor. If you are not God, do you work for him?" Joe replied, "I guess so, sometimes. And now that you ask, I will be doing it a lot more."

Building for the Future

Once there was a good man who wanted to do good. One day he noticed the miserable conditions in which a poor carpenter lived. The rich man called the carpenter in and commissioned him to build a beautiful house. "I want this to be an ideal cottage. Use only the best materials, employ only the best workmen, and spare no expense." He said that he was going on a journey and that he hoped the house would be finished when he returned.

The carpenter saw this as his great opportunity. Therefore, he skimmed on materials, hired inferior workers at low wages, covered their mistakes with paint and cut corners wherever he could. When the rich man returned, the carpenter brought him the key and said, "I have followed your instructions and built your house as you told me to." "I'm glad," said the rich man; and, handing the keys back to the builder, he continued, "Here are the keys. They are yours. I had you build this house for yourself. You and your family are to have it as my gift."

In the years that followed, the carpenter never ceased to regret the way in which he cheated himself. "Had I only known," he would say to himself, "that I was building this house for myself..."

“Martyrdom does not end something; it is only the beginning.”

Indira Gandhi
(1917-)
Address to Indian Parliament,
August 12, 1971

TWO ROADS Jesus pictures the world as a wide road. Masses of people, emerging from a wide gate, are streaming along it, walking comfortably along a level surface. They are going in a familiar direction. Their parents have walked in the same direction; and at the moment, their friends and neighbors are at their side. Surely it is obvious to head in this direction. Common sense, majority opinion, the experts all agree - there is no other route worth taking. People of many traditions are walking side by side. But, says Jesus, they are heading toward a precipice. The easy road leads to destruction.

There is, Jesus says, another road. One gets to it by going through a narrow gate. And the road itself is hard. It cuts across the broad road, and is heading in a different direction. Very few people are walking on it, and those who are doing so are not finding it easy. Others view them as an inconvenience. "Everybody" knows that the wide road makes sense. Why cut across the accepted path? You're bumping into people! You're disturbing them, unsettling them in their views! Do you think you know better than people have always known? But, says Jesus, the hard way leads, not to the precipice, but to life.

In Jesus' time, the broad, realistic road led to conflict with the Romans and destruction of Jewish civilization. Jesus wept, for the people of Jerusalem didn't know "the things that make for shalom" (Luke 19:42). But he offered them an alternative road, one that was difficult but that would lead to life. It was an alternative of holy living.

Today Jesus is offering us the same alternative. Once again, there are the realists - people who patronize and reassure. Surely the broad road doesn't lead to destruction; good Christians have been taking it for centuries. Precisely. That's why it's so hard to do something new. But there is nothing that is more dangerous than the obvious. The pressures of tradition, "informed opinion," military-industrial complexes, principalities and powers, and the rest are intense. But it is these forces and institutions, and the realists who run and justify them, that are keeping the world on course for the precipice.

Jesus is calling his disciples today to turn their backs on conventional wisdom and to follow him. His way crosses the currents of our time. It is a narrow way, and difficult; it promises no assured results. Neither withdrawing nor compromising, it guarantees conflict. But it offers the possibility of something new. Jesus' way is a living alternative, a holy way.

Alan Kreider *Journey Towards Holiness.*

*"all of us are missionaries...
it is through us
that GOD loves the world"*