

Have you ever experienced the chaos of an overcrowded airport? Early one morning, I was in a busy airport that had a mix of gates and shops, all in the same area. While I'm in line to board the plane surrounded by people, I suddenly realize, my line isn't moving towards the jetway, because I'm in the Starbucks line! Our lives can feel like this, full of chaos, distraction, and uncertainty. God anticipated our circumstances and has a plan for us that comes through in today's readings. We hear the words of King David repeated, "Lord, you will show us the path of life." Let's explore the meaning of these words in today's scripture.

Today's Responsorial Psalm says these words, "Lord, you will show us the path of life." We might ask the question, "What is the path of life?" David starts the psalm by describing his relationship with God saying, "The Lord is my allotted portion and my cup," but what does that mean? "Portion" refers to land, parceled out to each tribe when the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan. David is saying he is like the priestly tribe of Levites who were given no land because the Lord was their "portion." "The cup" refers to a social custom at a king's banquet, when the host would fill the cups of his guests. A "full" cup, symbolized the king's favor and represented an offer of protection and inclusion in the host's household. So David is telling us, by accepting the path of life we rely on God as his adopted children and we accept his cup, whatever level of fullness it has.

David goes on to describe the path of life with the words, gladness, confidence, and abounding joy. This is what God's promises as we follow His path. Finally, and most importantly, David calls out salvation as a feature of God's path saying, "You will not abandon my soul to the netherworld." In summary, God's path of life requires surrender, and promises protection, joy, and salvation.

Now we move to a reading from Acts, written 1000 years later. Peter changes our question from WHAT is the path of life to WHO is the path of life. He stands up in front of the Jews and Gentiles at Pentecost and says, "Jesus the Nazarene, was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs." Then he quotes the Psalm again, worded in the present tense, "You have made known to me the paths of life." So, Jesus becomes the path promised by God. Jesus, who preached the words, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me."

C.S. Lewis explains Jesus' role in the path of life using a car analogy. He says, "God invented us like a man invents an engine. A car is meant to run on gas, it will not run properly on anything else. Now God invented the human machine to run on HIMSELF, He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on, there is no other." His path was designed from the beginning and involves the Word of God, the Eucharist. C.S. Lewis says, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there."

Finally, in the gospel, Jesus SHOWS us what the path of life looks like. Cleopas and another disciple are walking away from Jerusalem, away from their time with Jesus their rabi, and we are told they are downcast. They had hopes that Jesus would show them the path of life, but his life ended suddenly, and they are returning to their previous lives. We often see this in our own lives, when we hit a roadblock, a crisis, or just let our faith life erode.

But, then Jesus comes to walk with us, as he does with the disciples. He meets us where we are, as the gospel says, "He drew near to them." He works in mysterious ways, we are told, "Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." And he listens to our hearts, as he says to the disciples, "What were you discussing as you walked along?" Finally, he breaks bread with them. For us this comes in our encounter with Christ in the Eucharist where he gives us His body and blood for our salvation, the summit of God's path of life.

Next, we see the disciples energized by their encounter with Christ and with the gladness, confidence, and abounding joy, promised in God's path. They run seven miles back to Jerusalem to share what they learned with the Apostles and the other disciples. The Lord showed them the path of life, and they were anxious to share with others what they learned.

All people choose a path of life, and we live in a time when many people, especially young adults, are turning to the Catholic Church to find their path. On March 1st, 4,700 people gathered at USD where over 1,800 new Catholics prepared to join our faith, an increase of 44% from just two years earlier. This trend is real, and we are blessed because 17 St James members received their sacraments at our Easter Vigil, up from just 6 last year. This trend is alive throughout the US, and worldwide especially in places like France, Hong Kong, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

What does that mean for each of us? Well, it encourages us to gain a deeper understanding of our faith. One of the newly baptized is coming with his bride to be married at St James next month. His bride told me she has been fielding a lot of faith-related questions from her fiancé and feeling some pressure to stay ahead of him in his faith journey, since she's forgotten much of the material she learned about our faith growing up. This is a time to refresh our understanding and go deeper in our faith and God's path of life.

I encourage you to make a commitment to read one catholic book this year, to read the Catholic Catechism, or listen to a "Bible-in-a-year" podcast. We need to be like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, to walk with others and articulate our faith. We also are especially called to share our encounters with Christ, large and small, and be like Cleopas and the other disciple, eager to share how the Lord has touched our lives.