

Homily for July 11, 2021, 15th Sunday Year B

Last weekend, two of my friends entered into marriage. They are “Hobos.”

The word “Hobo” came into use in the United States in the eighteen Nineties. A Hobo is an itinerant worker. The word does not refer to someone who is looking for handouts. In the history of the United States, the number of people in this category grew during the great depression, when large numbers of men took to the road to find work, often day-labor, to support their families.

Of my two friends, I will use their Hobo names:

Gipsy Moon’s father was a hobo when he was young. After she had raised her children, she started seeking out this part of her father’s life and learning from the people who live this way. And she has, for decades, been called more and more to a life that needs very little and felt free to move around to help others in need.

Dutch has been on the road for decades. He is a licensed electrician. He tries to live without spending any money. Gipsy Moon and Dutch have some plans for providing their limited needs when the day comes when they cannot travel. But they seek to have little.

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To not have much, to not spend money. Mind you, I have a lot, and find it hard to do with even a little less than I do. I am also aware that many in our parish have lived at some point without home, transportation, phone, or knowing where their next meal will come from. Some of you don’t know if you can pay the light bill. Some have lived in cars. But it is an interesting situation to ponder in a first world nation structured around consumerism like our United States. What does it mean to live radically simply?

Many hobos in towns do something called dumpster diving – getting still edible food that has been thrown away.

A life like that is put into more perspective when looked at as a choice to spend as little money as possible. With that in mind, to even go up from living only with what is in a backpack to owning a bicycle – let alone a car - would immediately

show how much more one needs money. With a bike, one would need funds to keep the bike in working condition and replace parts. One can't go some places without needing to lock up the bike – and then needing to return in order to get it back.

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Why do people do this; live by choice in a way radically different from the rest of the society they participate in?

Some reasons might center on the negative. It might have to do with a cynicism toward people, or to the particular world in which they are surrounded.

Or they may be trying to draw attention to a particular message - perhaps injustices in the economic conditions of others, or the need to reduce their carbon footprint. Sort of like “reduce, reuse, recycle” taken to the limit.

There seems to be for some of them a reason related to spirituality. Perhaps for one it is a Franciscan desire to follow the Lord in poverty; for another it is a solidarity with the poor and vulnerable; perhaps there is a thirst that leans toward the monastic or hermitic. There may be a recognition of those things we hear said time and time again, “live simply, that others may simply live,” and “What we own ultimately owns us,” and the classic, “You can't take it with you.”

Perhaps it is something that strikes them earlier than it does many of us – this realization as we get older that we need to down-size. We let go as we get older – even of possessions. It is that question that we sometimes ask, “how much do I really need?”

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Of course, having such thoughts is not to say that a Hobo life works for any of us who have family to care and provide for – food and shelter now and security in the future.

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These types of thoughts come forward every time we hear the gospel for today. Even for this first, short journey, the question that comes up is, “Why take little with them?”

The answers have been many over the centuries. They still make sense today. And they ring with a truth that makes us wonder about how we live our entire life as Christians.

Why travel light? So that you are not worried about what you have. So that you can travel fast. So that you are not distracted by things and where they are and if someone will take them.

Why travel with another? Because we are made for family, and are Christ's family. We help each other. Our different qualities complement each other. For mutual support.

Why travel light? So that the main issue can remain the main issue: preach repentance, drive out demons, heal the ill.

Why travel with no funds? I once heard a priest remind the young members of the faith that when you don't have anything, you have to ask for assistance. And what does that mean? It means you have to encounter people, even for food and shelter. The same need for others that brings one to travel two-by-two is what is to be satisfied by staying with others. Not remaining separate. Be engaged in others. That is how one knows of the illness to care for and the troubles that have to be cast out. Get to know the people. Don't talk at them, but converse with them.

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Of course, Jesus sending the twelve out is a particular event. The apostles are not homeless. They have families. But they also have dropped everything to follow Him. He is sending them on a short mission.

In our world, there are a significant number who are forced to live from day to day. In our nation, few people sense they are called to the radical life of the Hobo.

In our Faith, few people sense they are called to the radical life of a Missionary.

But we are ALL called to the mission of sharing the Gospel. We daily are called to follow Christ and proclaim Him. We are called to express - in words others can understand - why Christ matters, why God matters, why the Gospel is really good news.

And it helps if we travel light, don't walk alone, and keep our focus on Christ and the person in front of us.