

Witness To Our Faith – Jim Rogers

About seven or eight years ago, I started to think more carefully about this question: “What next?” The question wasn’t prompted by any unhappiness in my life. I knew how lucky I was and how appreciative I should be for the many good fortunes that had come my way. I had a great wife, great kids, satisfying job, living in a vibrant town, all that good stuff.

And yet, for all that I was adrift. I couldn't answer that question: “What next?” Make more money? Contribute more to my company, or my profession, or my community? Spend more time with family? Do some good things for the poor? Go out in the woods on my mountain bike? Learn to paint? These would have all been good things to do, but there was no organizing principle. There was no ultimate orientation, and so there was no hope of ultimate fulfillment. It wasn't an unpleasant life, and it was fulfilling in a *limited* sense. But that wasn't good enough. Aimlessness just doesn't work. I needed some ultimate orientation.

Now, my kids know that I love etymologies, or word histories. I'm not a student of languages, but I collect word histories the way that some people collect seashells on the beach, and then I torment my children by passing on these gems to them. And it's a neat little bit of word history that the word “orientation” is rooted in the word “orient” and that the root meaning of “orient” is East, *that* way (in the direction of the Crucifix). In our Church, as in many Churches, the altar, and the Crucifix are set up in the East. It's really very clever that Church architects throughout the ages have given us this clue that if we are seeking ultimate orientation then *that* is the right direction to look.

OK, so East, toward the Crucifix, toward the Eucharist ... maybe that sounds like I've found my way a bit, but it probably also sounds very vague, right? Well, yes. If you want to fault me for one thing as a Catholic, fault me for being vague. I only have some vague, dim sense that the Church can mediate Christ to me. I only have some vague, dim sense of what I think happened on that first Easter morning. The sense in which I assent to the all of the teachings of the Church ... that is also vague. Probably, if I could make my faith less vague and more specific, I'd be a better Catholic.

But, for the next thirty seconds or so, you don't have a better Catholic; all you have is me, and my feeling is this: it's better to journey vaguely in an Easterly direction than it is to just wander adrift in the void. I might not be a great Catholic, but I know I can witness to that: wandering adrift, with no ultimate orientation, that doesn't work. And so then, if I'm going to go somewhere, where am I going to go? And on that point, my response is the same as that of Saint Peter: “Lord, to whom would I go, if not you?”

If you see me stumbling East, please help me along. If you see me wander off course, please nudge me back in the right direction. That orientation is what I seek when I come here every week. I'll keep coming back for more and I'll keep joining you, looking with hope toward that crucified man at the East end of our Church.

Thank you.