

A View from the Pew **August 24, 2008**

To Save the Lost

Looking back from the vantage point of adulthood, it seems strange. At the time, in my early teens, it seemed merely a way to entertain myself on a summer weekend.

My bicycle was my primary mode of transportation. I rode everywhere. I lived on my Italian racer: hand-painted a bright and speckled gold, the handlebars turned around for distinctive flair. It was clearly unique and it was clearly mine.

On several occasions I took off from home on a whim – took off for parts unknown – truly unknown. There were miles of populated streets in every direction between the urban and suburban parts of my major metropolitan city-home. Alone on a ride, I started peddling, turning, riding, meandering randomly, riding more, arbitrarily picking a new direction, cycling more – until I was in a totally unfamiliar neighborhood. That was the point – to be lost – and not know the way home. Lost and alone – the challenge was to find my way back.

It seems odd now. At the time, it never occurred to me that I couldn't get myself out of the predicament. I recall the sudden sense of exhilarating panic when I realized that I was truly lost. I also recall the sense of dogged determination that I could save myself. Happily, I remember the sense of profound accomplishment and relief when I eventually managed to recognize a landmark and finish navigating my way back home. No fanfare awaited me on my return – no one knew I was lost – except for me.

Looking back from the vantage point of adulthood, it seems normal. Don't we all spend much of our lives feeling lost? Aren't we often uncertain exactly where we are, emotionally and spiritually – and where we are going? Moreover, aren't we the ones responsible for this feeling – the sense of being away from home – the sensation that we are looking for a place of safety? And like that boy on the bike – no one knows we are lost and searching – no one except us.

In his book, *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell wrote about man's searching. "People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about."

How many of us "feel the rapture of being alive" through most of our lives? I now think that "the rapture" is what I was seeking as a boy on my bike. "Life is understood looking backwards but it must be lived forwards," noted Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. Maybe he was right – perhaps it is only hindsight that allows us to comprehend our circumstances – to see that we felt lost and were searching. As a boy I didn't know what I was searching for.

Part of the reason I felt lost was that I did not have a map. I intentionally left home without direction. Don't we do this in life, as well? Don't we often navigate without a chart? However, we are not really lost and not really without direction. In The Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells of the story of the shepherd finding the one lost sheep: "*So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.*" (Matthew 18:7-14) Our Father knows where we are and we have directions to find Him.

I think in our spiritual lives that we choose to get lost. Possibly, that is our misguided attempt to "feel the rapture of being alive." In reality, what we are looking for – that rapture – is looking for us. "*For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.*" (Luke 19:10)

That's my view from the pew.