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Commemoration of Saint John of God
Pastoral Nature Notes
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The 'Frozen' Narrow Winding Way

I recently had the opportunity to traverse some of Minnesota's snowmobile trails. I haven't done a lot of snowmobiling. This was the first time I had the opportunity to travel some of central Minnesota's frozen gateways. What I found were frozen gospel treasures.

It was a partly sunny Sunday afternoon. Crisp yet not cold, with only a variable breeze that occasionally tickled the cheeks. The sun climbing higher from its winter laziness had caused some random thawing. Upon setting out, we almost immediately intercepted the local trail. As we traversed it the first area being a deciduous forest with the trail making regular immediate curves challenged my corroded snowmobiling skills. Immediately crossing a handful of paved roads, we came to a scrub spruce swamp. Like the deciduous forest its curves, too, were immediate and definite. The tattered branches of the scrub spruces obscured the trail and curves ahead. Yet beyond each curve was another picture-perfect vision that only God himself sees all summer because of the in-accessibility.

As we traversed, there were straight shots in the trail but very few and many of those had obstacles both man made and nature given: trees, fences, hills, power poles, and bumps. All given to test and hone the mechanical skills of the sled's coachman, and to grind the corrosion off of this particular driver.

There were other travelers along this frozen winding way. Alas, a canine bandit scurried away with his ever-fearful guilty look. This coyote, surprised by our presence, struggled through the snow to look innocent of whatever crime he was on his way to commit. Later down the trail evidence of death: turkey feathers and parts. An unfortunate traveler of this frozen trail who met its demise. To a herd of deer this frozen winding way was a welcome change from the depths of the late winter snow.

Following one particular sharp curve we found ourselves now in the midst of a willow/alder swamp that had significant smatterings of cattails. What was particularly striking about this is that just above the surface of the snow were the fuzzy tails of the cats, the catkins of

the alder and the red spears of the twigs of the red willows. It was as if we were flying over the top of all of them! Areas in summer that would take hours to cross, we now crossed in seconds.

As evening drew on the shadows grew long. The sky tinted red, and a few stray, long, platy, clouds spoke to our band of snow sailors of the delight that the red of evening sky proclaims to sailors: No inclement weather on this winding frozen way this night.

In fact, the moon and stars as they pierced the night sky seem to desire to light the way second only to the sleds bouncing headlights as we made our way home. The curves and bumps of the frozen winding way made the trail seem more ominous in the darkness. Yet having been this way before while looking different they were not to be feared. All was simply to be gone through with curiosity and wonderment of the beautiful designs now encased in darkness but no less profound. This experience was like Matthew 7:13-14 jumping right off the page:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”

On this Lord’s day we were some of the privileged few to find it, to see it, to experience it. It most certainly was frozen. Yet so much of it speaks of the journey of one who strives for holiness.

Following the Lord can be cold, bumpy, dangerous, and unpredictable. More often than not we cannot see what is behind the next curve. Yet what is in front of us is a mosaic of beauty as we traverse each curve if we are willing to see it. The Lord most certainly wasn’t thinking of the dense scrubby spruces when he likened the flowers of the field being more elegant than Solomon. Yet even against the undisturbed snow beneath their green trepid boughs a beauty of their own emerges.

The frozen winding way of holiness will always have its vandals like the coyote. Those lurking along the way to take advantage of any easy prey. Even when winding, there can be times when we feel like heaven is within grasp. We are so high up that even the tops of the brush and cattails are beneath us. We seemingly fly.....until we find another unpredictable curve with its bumps which rattle us back to the reality of struggles of this life. All the obstacles, bumps,

power poles, and fences along the frozen winding way remind us of the words of the Letter to the Hebrews:

...For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges.”

Endure your trials as “discipline”; God treats you as sons. For what “son” is there whom his father does not discipline?

It is the obstacles of the frozen winding way of life that clean off the corrosion of our spiritual powers just as the literal winding way removes the corrosion from our ability to command the sled. As we gain the agility with the sled, our agility for seeing beauty becomes more open. For we can focus on what is around us not just what may be the next snowy pothole.

There is also the obstacle of darkness. Inevitably, it will come to anyone who embarks on the frozen winding way to heaven. However, it is not to be feared. The moon and stars are like Mary and the Saint’s reflecting God’s light. As a result, God’s light is always there piercing through the night sky. The Lord at times can be distant. The frozen winding way at times will be obscured by darkness yet still the beauty of the snow beneath it reflects enough light from the moon and stars so that we can still make out the beauty before us!

In all of this, that of which I have written and that which I have left unwritten, it shows us that the “Frozen winding way” teaches that Jesus’s words in Matthew 7:13-14 are not meant to be seen as merely a struggle. No without question The ”Frozen Winding Way” is to be seen as it is a beautiful, precarious, eventful, frozen, winding way to the Glory of Heaven!