

## ***I haven't gone anywhere.***

Mike Nichols, directing the 1967 film *The Graduate*, contacted Paul Simon of “Simon and Garfunkel” fame to provide a soundtrack for the film. Simon produced a score which closed with a chorus that went: *Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio / A nation turns its lonely eyes to you / What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson / Joltin ' Joe has left and gone away.*

Joe DiMaggio heard it and it bothered him. At lunch with Simon he complained: *What I don't understand is why you ask where I've gone. I just did a Mr. Coffee commercial, I'm spokesman for the Bowery Savings Bank and I haven't gone anywhere.* Simon had a hard time explaining why he added this reference to Joe DiMaggio. It just came to him like that! But as time went on Paul figured it out. The 1960's were stressful times: there was the Civil Rights movement with its marches and violent reactions, the Vietnam War, assassinations of prominent leaders, the radical changes in popular music – as with the Beatles and their hairdo, to say nothing of “Death of God” publications.

To Paul Simon Joe DiMaggio had emerged as an icon of a fading era – a simpler time of sentimental ballads, genuine heroes, a nation united and influential. Indeed I remember idolizing DiMaggio myself since my boyhood days, recalling his bearing on the ball field, quiet, attentive to one thing: hitting; his stance at bat: legs wide apart, tall, graceful in the outfield, the effortless swing – home run! In the unsettled times of the 1960's he presented a classic image of composure, simplicity, the “good old days”. I was lucky to watch him stride to the plate at Yankee Stadium several times in his prime.

Paul Simon, as a Jewish kid, must have been exposed to readings like our first one for today – a lamentation over the Babylonian exile of his forbears where the prophet says in effect: *Where are you God! Why don't you rip the sky open and come down? Bring us back the good old days!* Perhaps it was his unconscious memory of such readings that triggered the more current thought of Joe DiMaggio as a symbol of “good old days” within the range of Simon's own experience.

But today's Gospel reading raises a question. I mean, Joe DiMaggio resisted Simon's suggestion that he was no longer around - *I haven't gone anywhere.* Is a time of grace ever gone, despite hard times? Mark's Gospel comes across as if Jesus was gone, so be alert to his arrival – whether it be evening or midnight or dawn or morning. But if that re-appearance is so imminent at any moment from any direction, then maybe it's happening all the time and we are too preoccupied to catch it. In other words, Christ as grace is always present and possible; it is we who are absent.

I mean listen to this prayer attributed to St. Patrick – in which Christ becomes so present as to constitute an “environment” of gracious being – enveloping us:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me, / Christ behind me, Christ before me, / Christ beside me,  
Christ to win me, / . . . Christ beneath me, Christ above me, / Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, /  
Christ in hearts of all that love me, / Christ in mouths of friend and stranger.*

**Geoff Wood**