

'To be a Pilgrim'



We had the joy of staying in a little village in the Netherlands last year. We were taken to some amazing places. One afternoon we went for a drive and were amazed by the number of wayside shrines in one particular area. People on their journey to or from home could stop, pray, commend their day, their cares, their loved ones to God. And there was a real sense of 'presence': people stopped there, used them, even in this day and age. There was a real sense of knowing that, every step of the way, Christ was there, present, sharing the journey.

There is a contemporary song that has as its refrain: 'We are companions on a journey, breaking bread and sharing life; and the love we bear is the hope we share, for we believe in the love of our God.' It sounds nice but the way of a pilgrim is not at all straightforward. The paths are often difficult; there are temptations to leave the way; it is easy to lose sight of the goal. One needs to "labour night and day to be a pilgrim".

This week, in our Church, we will have read at the Eucharist the account of the two men returning to Emmaus after Jesus' crucifixion (*Luke 24: 23-35*). The two, overwhelmed at their loss, were making the pilgrimage back to their own town, back to their old life. They had followed Jesus, put all their faith in the fact that he was the Messiah and that he would bring the peace they were all were looking for. But he was killed. You can sense their anger and despair on the road, we also get a sense that they don't have much faith left.

They are so self-absorbed in their grief that they don't take much notice of "the stranger" who comes to journey with them. They get no insight when 'the stranger' opens up the scriptures. It is only when he makes the familiar action of breaking bread that their eyes are opened. 'Didn't our hearts burn ...' they said, as they looked back. Hindsight is great!

Pilgrim people keep their eyes open, to fix their eyes on Jesus, their head, recognise him 'with them on the road'. Pilgrim people seek to make it clear that, through Jesus' resurrection, "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot put it out". That is the pilgrim's challenge. On hymn says where Christ is on this journey: 'through the daylight, through the darkness, Christ leads on his great array: all the saints and all the sinners he has gathered on his way.'



We are living in difficult times: words like isolation and dislocation are being used so frequently. As a parish priest I am feeling for my people who are single or single parents and without great support, those in aged care facilities and at home that I am not able to visit, not able to share the Eucharist with. At times, cards, phone calls, emails, SMS, Zoom, seem inadequate!

As, day by day, we wear the white cross inwardly and outwardly, to whom will we seek to say, 'Brother, sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you.' The practical service is important but the 'as Christ to you' is even more important. It's worth laboring night and day.

Your brother on pilgrimage
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Prelate