

Encouragement Encouragement

July 2016 – Issue 60

Pilgrimage?

As often happens the Lord leads with ‘a word’. Knowing that I had something in mind for August – I pondered as to what I should write about in July, often a month for comings and goings, ends and new starts. It was not the time to think of the next issue as I had just completed ‘58’ and had time to think, but one word popped into my heart – *Pilgrimage*. It lingered as I thought of the fact that our lives are one continuous pilgrimage to the heart of God. None of us knows what awaits us, but we travel with the Holy Spirit at our side to guide us. This is a year of many ‘zero birthdays’ for friends and family, and I was reflecting on this as well. To pilgrimage is to journey, to travel in an ever changing landscape. The word itself means *to journey*.

When we look at our own lives with their twists and turns, periods of well-being and sickness, joys and sorrows, births and deaths, trials and tribulations, and many unexpected events and stories, I wonder how often we glance back and see themes, things learned, things still a puzzle, but that a string sometimes so light, sometimes more of a chain – links these events and enables us to continue the journey, even when hope seems to fail for better things.

Survivors of many traumatic events are often driven forward by a desire to share their experiences and give hope to others that they can overcome whatever difficulties and traumas affect them.

However, do we reflect on the fact that we are never alone in that pilgrimage, and that every step is marked out for us – and a preparation for the final journey to a new everlasting life? It is not easy to see all the links in the passage of life and it sometimes takes, just that, a lifetime, to see the connections. It is important to see each step as a preparation for that special journey to eternal life when all journeying will stop and ‘life’ become ablaze with joy.

These thoughts are reflected in books such as ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ (John Bunyan) and ‘The Way of a Pilgrim’ (Bacovain tran.) and shows that learning

takes place if we let it, in many circumstances of our lives.

The journey is also a move into a deeper knowledge and appreciation of God and an ever deepening prayer of the heart, as we learn that every second of our lives is known to Him on whom we depend completely.

The repeated prayer – echoes of the blind man who called out loud, “Son of David, have mercy on me, a sinner”, and reflected throughout the Pilgrim journey as ‘*Jesus have mercy on me*’ becomes a continuous prayer which enables a closer union with Jesus and enables us to be guided and taught. This prayer is known as ‘The Jesus Prayer’.

The beauty of the prayer is that it does not require feats of memory, or a book of prayer. It is simple, like the saying of St. Peter (Acts 4:12) it uses the Name, the ONLY Name by which we are saved. Sometimes when all around us seems dark, or illness invades the only prayer that is possible is Jesus – Jesus, and again, Jesus. It is an excellent prayer for we then put our trust in Him, not asking for anything, or thanking but simply trusting in Him to help us carry ourselves through the troubles and pain. We often call on the ones we love when loneliness and fear grips us rather like a child with a bad dream calls out ‘Mummy or Daddy’ knowing that help is at hand.

Sheila Cassidy, a doctor who, while serving in Chile was tortured and later wrote a book called ‘Prayer for Pilgrims’, based on her need for prayer and its difficulty in extreme situations. She mentions the Psalms which reflect many cries of the heart, and passages of scripture, but returns to the Jesus Prayer.

A missionary, Father Joe, who had returned from the missions very ill, after many years of service, was now suffering and he said this to me “When I walk, like any pilgrim I say only one prayer... *Jesus* and as I walk I spell out His name J-E-S-U-S with every step. That is all I am capable of.” What trust is implied in his prayer, and what resource and strength he gained.

Anyone who has been gravely ill or in any deep

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“I do not ask to see the distant scene one step enough for me” Blessed John Henry Newman

distress will know that sometimes the pilgrim's feet are bloodied and sore. The eyes cannot focus, the mind is not capable of thinking or reflecting, yet the tongue can still whisper that Holy Name and be resourced and uplifted. Each pilgrim has to go a little or more of the way of the Cross. It is then that we are tested as to our love for God and man alike. It is easy to love when we have everyone, around us, to support and encourage us, but in the solitude of struggle it can be more difficult to remain faithful. Yet the one support that is never withdrawn, even if it feels like it, is that of Jesus Himself. If we call on His Name He will hear us.

But another thought entered into my head: Could the Lord be calling on me, or others to actually go on pilgrimage, not only in life's journey sense but in the journey to a place of special significance? In this Year of Mercy we are encouraged by Pope Francis to perhaps embark on such a journey. There are many places in the world of particular importance, of prayer, and each has its value and charism. We are often called to go on this kind of pilgrimage and indeed the best journeys are undertaken by call or an often 'inexplicable desire to go there'. Pages can be filled with the names of these places, some more familiar than others, such as Fatima, Lourdes, Betania, San Nicolas Argentina, Shrine of Divine Mercy in Kraków, Rome, the Holy Land, Medjugorje, Assisi and Santiago de Compostella, Rwanda, etc. There are of course some of very special local importance. It may be a place which is special to one person where an enlightenment happened, or a breakthrough, or simply a place of joy or happiness. We are often drawn to these locations and receive a special grace by going. It can provide a time for personal reflection and special prayer. Each persons' Pilgrimage will be for different reasons but while it can be enjoyable it is distinct from a mere holiday, yet surely a Holy-day. Entered into with this in mind and as seekers we can receive abundant blessings, often on our return home.



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The journey that requires us to go nowhere but to deepen our relationship with God – Father, Son and Spirit is a journey inwards, often from head to heart. It leads us to encounter the God who lives within and who is forever calling us by name too, to enter more fully into the journey with Him until we find our final resting home.

In this year, and every year, we should continue our journey and follow the sign which says *this way to Heavenly Home*. Are you brave enough to go on that road?
Halina Holman

Pope Francis and Pilgrimage

"How important it is for our families to journey together towards a single goal. We know that we have a road to travel together; a road along which we encounter difficulties but also enjoy moments of joy and consolation. A pilgrimage does not end when we arrive at our destination, but when we return home and resume our everyday lives, putting into practice the spiritual fruits of our experience."
Rome Dec. 2015

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"Always remember this: life is a journey. It is a path, a journey to meet Jesus. At the end, and forever. A journey in which we do not encounter Jesus is not a Christian journey."
Rome 2013

Open House

There are many doors to 'the way'

Some bright with hope,

Some shadow'd and dark:

God's House is open,

'though there have been times

A seeker's flame was stifled...

Yet here, now, are the tools of a journey,

to find your way Home.

Yet who will answer His call?

CCY

Gracious God, in whom we live and move and have our being, be with us, throughout the course of our journey, so that, under your protecting hand, we may reach our destination in safety, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Feasts in July

1st St. Oliver Plunkett, 4th St. Maria Goretti

11th St. Benedict, Patron of Europe

14th St. Camillus de Lellis 15th St. Bonaventure

16th Our Lady of Mount Carmel

21st St. Lawrence of Brindisi

22nd St. Mary Magdalene

25th St. James the Apostle

26th St. Anna and St. Joachim

29th Saint Martha

30th St. Peter Chrysologus