

Getting There

'Are we there yet?' What parent hasn't heard the lament from the back seat of the car? How neatly that little voice, in all its longing and pathos, paints a verbal picture of life as a profound journey!

Have you ever noticed how much of life is spent 'getting somewhere'? In a single day we might catch a train to and from work, walk to the shops, drop off and pick up children, visit relatives, and so on. Our Christian faith can bring a refreshing perspective to these constant 'comings and goings', a perspective well articulated in a document on the topic of 'pilgrimage' which was released by the Vatican back in 1998 in anticipation of the Great Jubilee. This document points out that life is a journey. It is not an event that happens all at once. Life is a process that unfolds, step by step, day by day, year by year. It is a process of entrance and exit, leaving and coming, descent and ascent, travelling and resting. From their very beginning, human beings have walked in search of new goals and horizons.

From a Christian perspective life's journey is also the path that comes from and leads to God. Our Jewish and Christian ancestors walked dusty roads, climbed mountains and navigated seas as part of their journey to God. They marked their travels through time and space with sacred dates, symbols and geographic measures. The

physical journey was inseparable from the inner journey of their hearts and souls.

The Jesus story is an extraordinary journey. An itinerant preacher walks from town to town preaching the Good News. It is a path that ultimately takes him to Jerusalem, along the road to Calvary. Through the passage of death to resurrection and ascension into glory, Christ has blazed 'the way' for all to follow, all the way to eternal life.

Over the centuries Christians have undertaken pilgrimages to shrines and other sacred sites. The Jubilee Year was a special time of pilgrimage. So too was the 2002 gathering of world religious leaders in Assisi where they prayed for peace. So too will Australia be at the centre of pilgrimage come World Youth Day 2008, not to mention the arduous journey of preparing for it. In each case the physical journey gives symbolic expression to the spiritual journey of choices in faith.

I often find it helpful to draw upon the idea and practice of pilgrimage in those frustrating moments when I'm stuck in traffic and it seems to take forever to get to my destination. Instead of staring angrily at the red traffic light, I can turn my thoughts to the greater goal or relationship that underpins my trip. I can see the journey in terms of my love for the little niece I am picking up from kindergarten. Or in terms of gratitude for life's blessings of food and shelter as I set out to the supermarket. Or

the opportunity to impact upon the world as I make my way to a work meeting.

No matter how mundane the physical journey, there is always a bigger picture that envelops our footsteps and calls us to pray, hope and remember who we are: the body of Christ, a pilgrim people making our way to the higher ground of God's kingdom. Looked at in this light, we can also be sensitized to the holiness of the journeys of others, whether it be a baby's first steps or the perilous voyage of a refugee family.

Each celebration and season of the church is a summons to intensify our journey to God. In the company of Christ and his people, let's treasure each step.
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