

Homily - 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time Yr C, 13th October 2019

‘On the way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee’

I am on my way to Jerusalem. We are all on our way to Jerusalem. We are all on our way to crucifixion and resurrection. Maybe some of you have tasted some of that crucifixion and resurrection already. Either way, it is a process all of us have got to go through.

To get there we travel along a border. Ultimately it’s the border between this world and the next, between ordinary workaday life and life in the Spirit, life in God.

Jesus didn’t really belong to either Samaria or Galilee. He wasn’t really at home in either of them. He was always on the way to somewhere else.

Speaking for myself I think I can truly say that I always had this sense of not quite belonging, of being on the edge of another world, another reality. Nothing quite satisfied and I suppose I can’t avoid quoting the familiar words of St Augustine, which you probably know better than I do, ‘Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.’

I think church, and coming to church was my way of being different, of trying to find that other world, and like Naaman, my way of finding healing and new purpose. But even church, being devout and coming to Mass doesn’t completely satisfy. Even after that first healing new horizons beckon.

As you probably know, I started my working life as an Anglican priest, first in London and then in Leicestershire. It was a great and formative time, and I owe the Church of England so much. But again there was something missing, something not quite right.

Today in Rome, Pope Francis is canonising Blessed John Henry Newman. Here was a man I could really identify with, travelling with Jesus along that border, opening himself up to a future that was completely out of his control. This is the path I had to follow and in 1994 Carol and I made a submission to Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville and asked to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

One of the great dangers for us converts, and maybe not only for us converts, is to put the Church on a pedestal, to think that we have arrived. The Church isn’t perfect. It isn’t heaven. We are still on the journey, a journey that has taken Carol and myself not just across the Tiber but also across the Tamar as well!

Like the foreigners in today’s Gospel, let us give our praise to God and hear Jesus say to us, “Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.” And as we travel, let us make the prayer of the leper our constant refrain, “Jesus, Master, take pity on us.”