

As we come out of the winter months and see signs of new growth, we feel we can start looking forward to the summer. Some I know are planning their holidays – where are we going – how will we travel. Once on the road there is a mixture of anticipation – once my caravan goes through Sutton Cross I am beginning to look forward to meals in the open air, cycling country lanes. There can be an element of impatience – the cries from the back seat, ‘Are we there yet? How much longer till we get there?’

Of course life is a journey. At each stage we can look back, look forward; at each stage there is something to learn, to discover. There is a story I have told before from Spike Milligan’s book, ‘Puckoon’ set at the time of partition in a totally dysfunctional village on the Irish border. On this particular day the sun is shining and the central character Mulligan is happy, supremely happy. Suddenly he thinks ‘Could this be the happiest day of my life?’ And the very thought made him miserable. There is always more ahead of us on the journey of life, more to discover about myself, about life, about the world.

Last week, as we began our thoughts over Lent about Baptism, I remarked that faith is a journey, a journey of a life time. Baptism marks the beginning of that journey. In the course of our service of Baptism, we lay down a number of markers for the journey. At the outset of the journey, the parents and the god parents make undertakings about the context in which these children will be brought up, that they will provide an environment within which the values of the Gospel will be upheld.

By your own prayers and example, by your teaching and love,  
will you encourage *them* in the life and faith of the Christian  
community?

**With the help of God, we will.**

By your teaching and your love. Children learn from what we say – but they also learn from who we are.

I spoke earlier of life, of faith as a journey, always more ahead of us. As I have often said, the questions that lie at the heart of Baptism and Confirmation are questions not of people who have arrived but questions of people on a journey, with more to discover, more to learn of what it means to be a follower of Christ, a member of the Body of Christ. I can answer with integrity

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil – but evil is still at work in my life. There is still work to do, still further to travel on the journey.

Similarly I can reply with integrity

Do you submit to Christ as Lord – but there is still work to do, there are still parts of my life where Christ is kept at a distance.

But I am on that journey of discovery. I go back to some of my favourite words from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. (*Philippians 3:12-14 The Message*)

We are on a journey, *I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me.*

Our life journey, our faith journey – these are not undertaken as solo ventures. We travel in the company of others. Children come with their parents. Parents come with family and friends. The preferred setting for Baptism is one where the wider congregation is present. These questions are not just questions for the parents and godparents. They are not just questions for confirmation candidates later on this year. They are questions for us all as we journey on through life.

There is that other promise undertaken at Baptism.

You have heard these our brothers and sisters respond to Christ.

Will you support them in this calling?

*The congregation answers*

**We will support them.**

The congregation is not just there as spectators, we are there as participants, promising to accompany the children, the parents and godparents on the journey, offering our support and encouragement, in the welcome we give them when they come to join in the worship of the Church. But I just want to finish by lifting this question beyond the children we welcome today. Let us think for a moment of how do we accompany one another on this journey of life, of faith? It was said of the early Christian community, ‘See how these Christians love one another’. We come here not as isolated individuals, we come as parents, as husbands, wives, as those in work, as those retired, as those just starting out on life in school, in college. We come with our hopes and our fears; fears for the future, about health, about getting old, about our employment, our mortgage, our parents, our children, our marriage. How can we support one another in our calling?

We are a family on a journey travelling the journey of life, of faith together. ‘Are we there yet? Are we there yet?’ No, not yet. Yet more lies ahead, more to discover, more to learn from each other, more opportunities to help and support one another.

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith "A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"