

I remember a few years ago sitting with a lady in hospital drawing close to the end of a long battle with cancer over a period of 20 years. Liz had maintained a wonderful, yet deeply rooted, positivity over that period. We chatted over lots of things, her family, the ups and downs of her battle with cancer and we almost drifted into the whole issue of faith. I asked her, “You do know that God loves you, don’t you?” She smiled and said, “If I had not known that I would not have been able to cope.”

She had a sense of God’s presence with her at every stage of her journey – even when that presence seemed remote – even when she found it hard to pray.

In our Old Testament Lesson we read of the people of Israel preparing to move on from Mount Sinai. The preceding sections of this Book Exodus have told of the highs and the lows, the giving of the Law and the incident of the Golden Calf. In this particular passage, Moses is wrestling with the enormity of the task that God has laid upon him. He hears God’s promise that his presence will go with him. To which Moses comes back with a reply that could be summarised by, “If you are not going to be with us, I do not even want to start.”

We are talking here of setting out on a journey, a journey home. Not that they had even lived there – it was a place where they belonged as a people, a land promised to their ancestors. It was to be a journey fraught with danger and difficulty. The account of this journey that we have in Exodus has its highs and its lows, its moments of great faithfulness, its moments of abject failure.

But all through this journey, God is with them – the pillar of cloud, the provision of manna.

We too are on a journey; at one level a journey from life to death; on the level of faith a journey into life. I think of the words of Hymn 1, a chant from the Taize community:

Bless the Lord my soul, and bless God's holy name.

Bless the Lord my soul, who leads me into life.

Like Moses in our Lesson, we seek God's presence with us on this journey of a lifetime, this journey home. As I think of God's presence with us on our journey, two expressions, two categories of God's presence with us come to mind; those of grace and the Holy Spirit. As I reflected on this I turned to the Revised Catechism. On the issue of grace it asks the question, in the context of keeping the commandments:

“How can you carry out these duties and overcome temptation and sin?”

“I can do these things only by the help of God through his grace.”

This is followed by the question:

“What do you mean by God's grace?”

“By God's grace I mean that God himself acts in Jesus Christ to forgive, inspire, and strengthen me by his Holy Spirit.”

God forgiving me, inspiring me, strengthening me.

Turning to the question on the Holy Spirit:

“What does the Church teach about God the Holy Spirit?”

“The Church teaches that God the Holy Spirit inspires all that is good in humanity; that he came in his fullness at Pentecost to be the giver of life to the Church, and that he enables me to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ.”

Inspires all that is good; enables me to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ.

Just continuing our thoughts of life as a journey in the presence of God, a God who forgives, who inspires, who strengthens, who enables me to grow in likeness to Jesus Christ; I am called not just to travel but to travel with a purpose. The writer of Genesis tells us that when God called Abram, he called him with a purpose. “I will make of you a great nation I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (*Gen 12:2-3*) The nation was called not just for its own sake but that it might be a sign, an instrument of blessing on the wider world.

In teaching his own disciples, he called them to be signs. “You are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (*Matt 5:13,14,16*).

We are called to travel the journey of life with a purpose, to be signs of the Kingdom, to be beacons of hope in the world in which we live. And so in the post communion prayer set for today, as we give thanks for God giving us “every good and perfect gift” we pray that we may “be a living sign of that

perfect kingdom, where your whole creation will be made perfect in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And so, as we prepare to go back out into the world, to continue our journey before God, we join in praying:

Almighty God,

we thank you for feeding us

with the spiritual food

of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.