

I heard a lovely story at the coffee morning in the Parish Centre last Friday in aid of Miriam O’Callaghan’s trip to the Philippines. It was of a five year old child who was packing his suitcase for the holidays. Nothing unusual about that except for the fact the family were not going on their holidays for four weeks. The poor lad had heard his mother saying that he will be breaking up for holidays from School and then they will be going on their holidays.

School had broken up – so why weren’t they going immediately?

Of course, this is the season when people plan to go off on their holidays – some stay close at home some travel further away. But in each case we are planning a journey. What route are we going to take, where are we going to stay and what will we need to bring with us.

Of course, there are lots of other journeys that people undertake, some willingly, some forced upon them. Over the last number of years, we have seen the plight of refugees fleeing from their own countries. We have seen the tragic results of desperation - people dying on the open sea, crossing rivers. We have seen the criminal cynicism of people traffickers who profit from the fear and misery of others; indifferent to the fate of the people they put into boats.

What do we need as we undertake any journey, whether it be for pleasure, for work or in desperation?

We need to know where we are going. We need a plan for the journey.

We need companions along the way whom we can trust, that we are not alone.

On the first Christmas of the Second World War, King George 6<sup>th</sup>, in his address to the people of Britain as they faced into the uncertainty of war, quoted from the poem by Minnie Louise Haskins

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:  
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”  
And he replied:  
“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.  
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”  
So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.  
And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

*From ‘God knows’ Minnie Louise Haskins*

This morning Colm and Hazel are bringing their son Christopher; and James and Emma are bringing their son Tadhg for Baptism. As the Prayer Book points out, it is the first step in a journey, a journey of a lifetime, a journey with Christ, a journey into Christ.

So, I want to think about that journey. These two lads are just at the very start, the rest of us are at different stages of that journey. So what course do we set on this journey? As you well know by now, I find much food for thought in this service of Baptism and the promises that are made.

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

**I reject them.**

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

**I renounce them.**

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

**I repent of them.**

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

**I turn to Christ.**

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

**I submit to Christ.**

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

**I come to Christ.**

Questions as I always say not of people who have arrived, who have got it all sorted but questions of people on a journey. Almost like a spiritual satnav, alerting us when we have gone off course, guiding us back onto the right route.

We need a companion along the way, someone we can trust. On the night before he died, Jesus promised his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, one who would lead them into all truth, one who would remind them of all that he had taught them. In the passage we read from Galatians, Paul encourages his readers to live by the Spirit, to be guided by the Spirit. So I rather like the way the translation ‘The Message’ puts this text:

<sup>16</sup>My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God’s Spirit.

Then at the end of our portion we are encouraged to allow ourselves to ‘be guided by the Spirit’ (v 25) The word that we have translated as guided has connections with military formation, of a group of soldiers marching in a row, keeping in step with their leader. So we have ‘be guided by the Spirit’, ‘Keep in step with the Spirit.’.

So, knowing that we are not alone, confident of God’s presence, keeping in step with the Spirit, animated and motivated by the Spirit, we embark on our journey of faith. Yes we get it wrong, go off course at time, but God is there ready to forgive, to strengthen, to lead us further on.

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Colm and Hazel, James and Emma, may God bless you and your children as you guide them along the journey of life and may you find in this place fellow explorers on the path of faith.