

Sisters of Jesus Way Advent 2006



Our Dear Friends,

There is much about journeying in Scripture not least in the nativity stories. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem and then with the infant Jesus fled to Egypt. When at last they returned to Nazareth they were the same Mary and Joseph and yet they were not the same. Life's experiences change all of us for better or for worse but it is not about that we are writing but rather the choice we make as Mary and Joseph did to journey with God and the inward journey that takes place alongside. As the Patriarchs moved from place to place in the arid desert, inwardly God was changing them. Similarly as Moses led the children of Israel for forty long years guided by the presence of the Lord in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night a rabble of frightened slaves became a humbled but powerful nation. All of these and many more chose to journey with God. The early Christians did not use the phrase Christianity as we do but rather "the Way".ⁱ Felix the Roman governor we read "was well acquainted with the Way".¹ Jesus spoke of a road to be travelled. "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."ⁱⁱ Through the centuries and to this present day countless numbers follow the Way.

We Sisters chose to journey with God and we are still surprised where that journey has led us. None of us, as we yielded our life to the Lord Jesus, saw that one day we would live in West Kirby in sturdy houses gifted by the heavenly Father. It has been an exciting journey right up to the present day. We can say with absolute confidence that life is never dull or boring if you journey with God. We would all also acknowledge that there has been an inward journey. We are the same yet not the same people as we were when the journey began.

The chorus of a song we often sing speaks of this outward and the inward journey.

"May this journey bring a blessing,
May I rise on wings of faith:
And at the end of my heart's testing,
With your likeness let me wake." iii

In many ways this short verse says it all. May our journeying on the Way bring a blessing to many, as it most surely will. May our trust in the heavenly Father be such that we rise above the circumstances that threaten to overcome us. At our journey's end may we awake in heaven in the likeness of the Lord Jesus.

Yet if we are honest we must confess that often this most important of all journeys is the one that is farthest from our minds. The cares and worries of everyday overwhelm us. We bury ourselves in television to escape. Our computers fascinate us (sometimes!). We have heard several times recently about adults addicted to computer games or eBay. There can be a restless urge for more and more whether that is the latest mobile phone or clothes or new places to see. Instead of possessing possessions, they possess us. Restlessness is always a sign that we have lost our way. Those who are journeying with God have inner peace.

Rev Brian Galliers, a Methodist minister who influenced the formation of our community, spoke to us in the early days about contentment. "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,"^{iv} wrote St. Paul. Brian exemplified this in his own life. This is not stoical acceptance but trust in the love of God. Contentment is in short supply humanly speaking but it is both gift and sign for those who travel with God.

Perhaps the beginning of the journey for many of us is to confess that we have lost our way. Thankfully, there are many beginnings on this road. How do we find the way back? It isn't finding the road as such but finding our dear Companion on the Road, the Lord Jesus. When we find him we are back on the Way and travelling in the right direction. We do not need to travel far to find him. He is right beside us, waiting for us, loving and forgiving. We do need however, to be quiet and listen to his voice. That may need some action on our part, closing down the computer, turning the television off or forgoing a shopping trip, making a cup of tea or coffee and sitting down and reading this letter slowly, listening to the Lord!

Sometimes fears and anxiety fill us with apprehension. The fears are very real. However often we are told not to worry, it does not help. It is impossible; that is the very thing we can't do. There is a way through if we are travelling on the road and that is to tell our dear Companion on the Way all about it. He understands. He gives

courage and when our eyes are on him instead of all the problems around us we are beginning to learn trust. Inwardly “the wings of faith” are forming and we are journeying on. A chorus we sang in our Bible study recently had meaning for many of us.

“When the road is rough and steep,
Fix your eyes upon Jesus.
He alone has power to keep,
Fix your eyes upon Him.”^v

We may have wandered from the Way because we think, using today’s language, that we have blown it. Our fall has been great and guilt overwhelms us. It may have been a very public fall, known far and wide. Whether only we know it, or others as well, the consequences are the same. Failure stares us in the face. On the Way with our Companion, failure does not have the last word. “The Christian story sees failure as part of a bigger picture, part of a journey and not a disaster or the dead end.”^{vi} There is forgiveness. Humbled we journey on “in closer, dearer company”^{vii} with “the loved Unseen”.

“Thus shall I walk with Thee,
The loved unseen;
Leaning on Thee, my God,
Guided along the road,
Nothing between.”^{viii}

There is a freedom and simplicity that marks forever followers of the Way. Material possessions lose their hold upon us. When we are cluttered with belongings we suffocate our life with God. Take a deep breath and give some away. Share with others. For on this road we are in company with others. We are not meant to journey alone. Love is the Way and love excludes selfishness. There is joy in giving. Moreover our Companion will open our eyes and along the Way we will touch all those we encounter with his love.

As soon as Christmas is over newspapers, magazines and brochures begin to drop through letterboxes urging us to turn our minds to faraway places. A holiday is not wrong nor is enjoying it. But as the travelling is planned remember there is another journey, the important one, our journey with the beloved Companion. This is the road that “leads to life”^{ix} said Jesus.

Your Sisters with you on the Way,

The Sisters of Jesus Way.

i Acts 24:22
ii Matt 7:13,14
iii Margaret Becker & Keith Getty Songs of Fellowship 1382
iv Phil 4:12
v Norman J Clayton Songs of Fellowship 1612
vi Fr David O’Malley SDB Don Bosco Today
vii Washington Gladden Hymns and Psalms 802.
viii Horatius Bonar Methodist Hymn Book 354
ix Matthew 7:14
