



Arriving at way's end Lenten liturgical reflections on journey

Christians soon enough saw themselves as the people of the way. The Lord of Life and Truth was understood as the Way. The season of Lent styles itself as something of a journey, and celebrates various markers and journeys across its 'forty' days.

Immediately the 'forty' triggers a response. It calls up the time of waiting under the chaos of the waters when the future of humanity and indeed creation hung in the balance. Journey's end was the setting of the rainbow as the signal of a revised covenant with the all forgiving God. Journey's end is a new beginning. The forty year wandering in the desert in response to a lack of faith concludes with Moses at the borders of the promised land, unable himself to enter but able to send the ungovernable wanderers across to a new future of milk and honey. Again journey's end is a new beginning. For Jesus forty days of fasting and prayer brought about the end of a hidden life and with his baptism by John signaled a new beginning as a prophet of the unfailing love of God. Once more journey's end opens onto the commencement of the way: the way of preaching and teaching, healing, confronting and ultimately the way of the cross.

The Lenten season is replete with journey markers. The catechumens are led into the final stages of preparation as they prepare to pass through the waters of baptism, and the whole of the community prepare to welcome them and be transformed through their faith and presence. In this, Lent is a special time of anticipated rejoicing. Here journey's end is the grace of belonging. For the already baptised the season leads each believer more deeply into her or his own being, further uncovering the damages of sin, the deprivations of the spirit and the willfulness hidden in our hearts. This is the role of prayer, fasting, abstinence, good works, acts of charity, generosity and self-denial. Journey's end is to be more mindful of the way and more sure of our tread as we sojourn along its path.

To achieve these ends the liturgy takes us firmly in the footsteps of the Lord. With palms in hand we are perplexed by the eventual outcome of Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In the same liturgy the Gospel that is read gives an account of the Passion. The Good Friday devotion of the Way of the Cross follows Jesus' own steps. The Holy Thursday evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, the celebration of the Passion on Good

Friday afternoon and the Easter Vigil are one long, single, three day, act of worship and service, carrying us through to journey's end, that magnificent Sunday.

And so finally to that all encompassing final journey of three days in death and the triumph of the resurrection. In effect the end of the journey to the tomb is the beginning of the Way, away from the tomb, across into history and through to a final consummation in love. That is the final end of our journey.

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