

Reflection for 16th March (Second Sunday of Lent)

For many years there has been a steadily increasing market in the travel industry for what are known as “adventure holidays” – holidays in which you do not simply visit a particular place and relax or see the sights but engage in some more energetic or hazardous pursuit, some kind of adventure. Perhaps in some ways this growth in enthusiasm for the idea of holidays as an opportunity for questing, testing and adventuring into the unknown is a reaction against a culture which encourages us to believe that solutions, success and satisfaction can all be obtained instantaneously if we just press the right button.

The idea that nothing worthwhile is attainable without cost, that we never find what we seek in one easy step, and that life is really very much like a slow, patient journey of discovery and exploration is, of course, not a new one. It is something we have rediscovered and it is, fundamentally, a religious idea. There are pointers to it throughout the Old and New Testaments, including our reading from the book of Genesis today, which is part of the story of Abraham’s journey through Canaan.

Abraham had obeyed the call to leave his native land of Haran (which was somewhere in modern-day Iran) and travel towards the promised land of Canaan – a journey of major proportions in those days. And many centuries later Jesus journeyed through the land of Israel from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south to face the violent opposition ranged against him.

This is no philosophy of easy and quick solutions: these journeys are not exciting diversions. In both cases, the purpose is only going to be achieved by strenuous effort and suffering. What is asked of travellers who wish to follow this road is that they leave behind the maps they have always used – the expectations, assumptions and securities which have so far guided their lives – and embark on uncharted routes. These routes will pose threats of disorientation and danger – patience and endurance will be required.

Abraham is told to leave his native land, his kinfolk and his father’s home – in other words, all the outward props which had given him his identity and security. Jesus’ disciples are told “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them renounce themselves, and take up their cross and follow me.” They must be prepared to lose everything, even life itself, in pursuit of the true goal.

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