

My younger brother and I used to go Youth Hostelling. Round about this time of the year we began to plan for our summer jaunt; often it was the Lake District that attracted our attention. And so a number of postal orders were bought, each to cover one night's stay, self-addressed envelopes prepared, and the first letter sent off to our choice for the first night. Once that had been accepted, we were able to send off to book our next preferred stop-over—and so on. Often we had to change our planned routes because one of the hostels might not be able to accommodate us—that's why only one booking could be sent off at a time. As you can imagine, it could take weeks to get the ten-day expedition finalised. How spoilt is the present generation who can do the whole job in a few moments over the internet!

The choice of hostels depended on how far we felt we could walk—or sometimes, cycle—in a day. It was no good being idealistically hopeful of our ability to cover the ground; trust in our own strengths and being realistic about our known weaknesses dictated the route. Sometimes we could get it wrong, and then foot-weary—or saddle-sore—we would arrive at the Youth Hostel front door like the wanderer in the desert who finally finds an oasis that is not a mirage. How welcome was that arrival, how wonderful the prospect of a hearty supper and a good night's sleep, however primitive the facilities might prove to be. A resting place, a place of safety, the promise of protection, relaxation and renewal. Even on our last legs, the sight of the green triangle sign at the hostel gate put a new bounce in our step—home at last, our destination achieved. How welcome was that mug of tea at supper time—so eagerly drunk that I couldn't wait for the sugar to be passed up the long tables, converting me overnight into a sugar-free tea drinker.

Our Gospel this morning is one that is often requested for funerals - 'In my Father's house are many mansions' and 'I am the Way the Truth and the Life.' The comforting promise of life beyond the grave makes the reading such a favourite, though I suspect that many who choose this for their loved one's service are less familiar with the demand that we approach the Father only through belief in Jesus Christ. Be that as it may, the Gospel message seems to be straight forward in its promise - 'where I am, you will be also.'

However, there is an interesting twist to these familiar words. St John, as he wrote his Gospel, often introduced words that could be interpreted in more than one way, and scholars believe that he did this quite deliberately to give an extra dimension to the message he wished to project. One such is the word for 'rooms' or 'mansions' in our older translations. For, it has as its root the word for 'remain' - and we know how often John uses the concept of remaining, or abiding, in his description of Jesus and his saving work.

More often, this word was used in ordinary speech to describe stopping places on a journey—hostels or hospices providing temporary shelter for the traveller. It was in these wayside inns that the weary traveller could enjoy a night's rest before setting out on the next stage of his journey, heading no doubt for the next such place to stop and rest awhile the following night. These places would be set at appropriate distances from each other along a familiar trail or caravan route, but they were only intending to serve the passing trade, not to be permanent homes nor long-stay accommodation. They were the Youth Hostels of their day, providing a place to re-charge batteries ready for the next day's exertions.

Let me emphasise that this temporary resting place is not the primary and obvious teaching of John—he is undoubtedly pointing us to the permanent home we will have in heaven which

Jesus has prepared for us. However, by using this unusual word, he is hinting, I believe, to another meaning to set alongside the more straightforward one. John wants us to see life—both sides of the grave—as a journey towards the full fruits of resurrection. This journey, this Way, is to be found through Jesus because on the cross he has won the victory over death once and for all. In this sense, we already live in him with his risen life; our earthly journey is even now by the Way, who is the Truth and who gives us his Life.

So, John, I think, wants us to expect that even in this life we can find places of rest and comfort along the way. Places where Jesus is especially present, where he has prepared for us temporary stops where we can remain, abide in him. Now is that not the way we are encouraged to think of the Church, of the Mass, of the Reserved Sacrament? I like to think that every time we enter our Church; we are in a resting place prepared for us by the death and resurrection of Christ. Here at the altar we receive his precious Body and Blood, the food and drink of the traveller on the way to heaven. Here in the silence of the Tabernacle we trust to be in the presence of him who promised never to leave his people. Here we know him to be the generous and genial hosteller, who keeps his house ever ready to receive weary pilgrims bound for heaven, ready to serve them, ready to bid them fair journey as they step back into the world.

All this, of course, is, at the moment, just the theory. We have been denied the sanctuary of our Church buildings for understandable reasons – but for far too long for our liking. We look forward to being able to worship together and to enjoy each other's company and fellowship. We also feel the full pain of separation from our weekly place of peace and refreshment. When once we are again allowed into our church we will surely respond with relief and joy. For then we can rest and feed and be refreshed by the hospitality of the divine guest master, ready to begin another weekly stage of our journey to heaven, bound we are sure in seven days to find the next resting place made ready for us.

Each morning my brother and I, after a hearty breakfast in the Youth Hostel, would pack our panniers or rucksack, get out the map and plan the route for the new day leading on to another welcome evening rest at the next stopping place. What sights were we to enjoy in the coming hours? What energy we would have to expend to achieve our goal? But not to worry—the resting place has done its job, and we could set out renewed and refreshed and most of all full of hope. Christian pilgrims replace Youth Hostel for Church, and our rest and nourishment through the welcome of the of the celebration of the eucharist equally sets us up for the week ahead. For 'In my Father's house are many hospices which I have prepared for you, and I shall take you to myself so that where I am you may be too.'