

A PILGRIM PEOPLE

SEEKING THE DEEPEST DESIRES
OF THE HUMAN HEART

God desires to spend eternity with you! Really ... let that sink in a little. This is the greatest romance of all time ... the all-perfect, all-loving God wants to spend forever with YOU!! And because we were created for an eternal relationship with Him, we have a desire deep within our hearts for infinite goodness, happiness and love. Nothing less than Perfect will fulfill that desire.

Evidence of this desire for the infinite is clearly seen in our perennial Restlessness and search for meaning and purpose in our lives. Happiness, it seems, is always just around the corner, just over the horizon or just out of reach. How many of us think to ourselves: "if I could just get this particular situation fixed, then I would be happy." But then, when it is fixed, another situation arises once again "preventing our happiness." How many songs and movies depict this search for love and meaning?!

Truly, we were made with the capacity and desire for Perfect Love, Perfect Goodness, Perfect Peace. And we all know from experience, the Perfect cannot be found in this life. As St. Augustine's famous saying goes, "our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O God." Knowing this, we see that the ultimate fulfillment of our heart's desire will only be complete once we reach heaven. Thus, the time we have in this life is often depicted as a journey of faith, a pilgrimage, leading to our final destination. Our sin and lukewarmness can lead to many detours, false starts or we may even find ourselves seriously lost! Despite our sinfulness, God is always the persistent Father looking for His "lost child". God is the Good Shepherd going out in search of the one lost sheep.

The Old Testament recounts the beginnings of this ancient drama. In these Scriptures, we read the story of a people being led by their God to a place where they can dwell with Him. The Israelites, however, turn away from God, and repeatedly the Lord God sends prophets to remind Israel of His love for His people. Through the prophets, who lead the people out of exile and idolatry, God calls his people back to life with Him (Hosea 1, Isaiah 1:2-4, Jeremiah 2).

The New Testament continues the story of the tremendous power of God's love. God fulfills his ancient promise to send a messiah. Jesus invites us back onto the path toward the "promised land" and teaches "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Jesus' extraordinary life, culminating in his sacrificial death on the cross, ransoms all who would believe from sin and death. He has set us free from our attachments and sin and all that would lead us astray, and has opened the gates to the heavenly banquet.

"On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, tracing in trial and in oppression the paths he trod, we are made one with his sufferings like the body is one with the head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified."

Lumen Gentium, Vatican Council II



Lydgate and Pilgrims on the Road to Canterbury, Gerard Horenbout (ca. 1516)

THE BARQUE OF PETER

One ancient Christian symbol of the Church is a ship. The image of a ship portrays the Church as transportation between this world and the next. In Christian tradition, which views earthly life as a pilgrimage, the ship of the Church transports the faithful through the seas of the world to our heavenly home.



Gravestone of Firmia Victora (Detail), Museo Pio Cristiano

"People are made for happiness. Rightly, then, you thirst for happiness... True joy is a victory, something which cannot be obtained without a long and difficult struggle. Christ holds the secret of this victory."

Blessed Pope John Paul II



THE EUCHARIST

Food for the Journey

God gives us a taste of this heavenly banquet when we receive the Eucharist. This spiritual food, the ‘bread of the angels,’ nourishes our souls and sustains us so that we might persevere on our earthly pilgrimage. We might liken it to a spiritual energy bar! In fact, the word used for the Eucharist when received by a dying person is viaticum, the food for the journey or “passing over” to the next life.

“O boundless charity! Just as you gave us yourself, wholly God and wholly man, so you left us all of yourself as food so that while we are pilgrims in this life we might not collapse in our weariness but be strengthened by you, heavenly food.”

St. Catherine of Siena

In the sacrifice of the Mass, Christ’s passion is made present anew for us, as the bread and wine is transformed into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord, truly present in the sacrament. Christ, Himself, present within us through our reception of the Eucharist, lifts us up, renews our strength and re-invigorates us as we carry on our journey. Jesus, present under the appearance of bread and wine, nourishes our souls and refreshes our spirit.

The Christian life, from conception to natural death, takes the form of a grand adventure in which the Lord accompanies each believer every step of the way. Each moment of sorrow and struggle, every second of joy and delight purifies and strengthens us for the interminable bliss of everlasting life. The earthly life of a Christian then is marked not by incessant rules and codes of conduct, but by a process of transformation through which we grow ever more in charity until that day when we are called to, “Enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21).

“Jesus [...] gives himself to us in the Eucharist, shares our same journey – indeed, he becomes food, real food that sustains our life even at times when the going is rough, when obstacles slow down our steps. The Lord in the Eucharist makes us follow His path, that of service, of sharing, of giving – and what little we have, what little we are, if shared, becomes wealth, because the power of God, which is that of love, descends into our poverty to transform it.”

“Let us ask ourselves [in front of] Christ truly present in the Eucharist: do I let myself be transformed by him? Do I let the Lord who gives himself to me, guide me to come out more and more from my little fence, to get out and be not afraid to give, to share, to love him and others?”

-Pope Francis, *Homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi*

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6:51)



During the Month of November, a time when the Church remembers in a particular way those who have gone before us in death, these inserts are made available with the aim of presenting anew Catholic beliefs on the sacred goal of life: attaining the Kingdom of Heaven.

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