

July 2019

*This month's reflection is based on a short address about pilgrimage given at the end of a Eucharist for the Cell of Our Lady of Faith on 27th June. It is about pilgrimage in general, not specifically about Walsingham or our annual pilgrimage to "England's Nazareth" over Low weekend .*

The English word "pilgrimage" comes from a Latin word meaning "travelling abroad" or "across the fields". A pilgrim therefore is someone who is away from home. In one sense this seems rather obvious, since when we are on pilgrimage we are on a journey away from home, from where we live, from the everyday and familiar.

But if we think about it a little more deeply we may discover something a bit surprising. Journeys have destinations as well as starting points, so we need to consider where a pilgrimage is heading. To a particular shrine or holy place of course. But for pilgrims, the shrine or holy place is a representation or symbol of the ultimate destination of our journey of faith, our heavenly home.

Pilgrimage then is not so much a journey away from home, but a journey towards home. It is meant to be a homecoming.

Behind it is the idea that this world and everything in it is only temporary. It had a beginning and it will have an end. Our own stay here is even more temporary. Beyond this world and our mortal life in it there is a world and a life that do not come to an end, heaven, and that is our real home.

The whole of our life is therefore a pilgrimage and should be shaped by journey's end. Going on pilgrimage, as we call it, is an opportunity to refocus ourselves on our true and everlasting home and to reassess how our present life in this world is already making it familiar to us.