

Column – home

Few words are as evocative as “home”. Longing for home seems to transcend cultures and ages. This sentiment has found its way in cinema and song.

Who, for example, can forget Dorothy’s words in the Wizard of Oz, “No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home.”

Or, for that matter, Perry Como’s 1954 Christmas hit beginning with the line “Oh, there’s no place like home for the holidays”? Home, at least in its idealized form, is ubiquitous for warmth, welcome, joy and security. It is the place you can come when all other doors are closed.

Without a doubt, many homes fall short of this ideal. Violence, discord and substance abuse make them hellish places, places from which to flee. Nevertheless, the longing for secure dwellings remains. It seems to be as old as man. Man, expelled from the Garden, that place of perfect flourishing, longs to return.

Once I visited an elderly woman in hospital. Throughout my visit she continued to cry out: “I want to go home.” Finally, her daughter leaned over the bed and asked: “Mother, do you want to go to our house or Jesus’?” She didn’t know. All she knew, she wanted to go home.

What are we to make of this longing? Two things come to mind. First, we ought to strive with God’s help to make our earthly homes be the best we can. We can practice forgiveness and say please and thank you. We can cultivate listening and exercise patience. We can laugh and listen to music. We can plant flowers and find joy in shared work. We can pray and cry together. We can put out the welcome mat and extend hospitality.

As much as these make for happy homes, none, however, erases the longing for something beyond our present habitations. In the words of Hebrews 13:14: “For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”

Life in this present age is fragile. Death can separate us from loved ones. Tornadoes, hurricanes and fires can take down physical structures. Financial reversals can inflict hardship and scarcity. The quest for home, therefore, is as elusive as the longing strong. Like the elderly women I mentioned earlier, we yearn for home but find ourselves peering into a mist.

Mist or not, we have Jesus’ own word and promise, “I go to prepare a place for you.” That is enough. Our homes on earth can be havens of blessings and peace because we know they point to something beyond, to habitations more secure and enduring.

How can we be sure? Again, we have Jesus’ own word and promise: “I go to prepare a place for you.” That is enough. Life in the present can be wonderful not the least because we know who holds the future and that the best is yet to come.

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families; We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain-glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh; turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we be evermore kindly affectioned with brotherly love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

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