

## **Society of the Precious Blood**

**Sermon at start of Pilgrimage from St Thomas of Canterbury , Goring on Thames : 28 June, 2016**

**Hebrews 11.8-10; Luke 12.22-24**

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

After nearly a year of planning and preparation by many people the day has arrived for this Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving and the start of the pilgrimage.

It is a time of **thanksgiving**

- For the initial founding of Burnham Abbey in 1266, 750 years ago;
- For the first Sisters who left Goring Priory and made their way to the Abbey
- It is a time of thanksgiving for the restoration of the Abbey in 1914 and
- For the Sisters of the Society of the Precious Blood, as a contemplative order, when they reoccupied the site in 1916 exactly 100 years ago.
- It is also a time of thanksgiving for the present day Sisters who continue to live a life of prayer, who are continually on an inner journey, an inner pilgrimage seeking God in all things.

We are a pilgrim people and each one of us is on a journey, both an inner spiritual journey and an outer journey, our life's journey. There is nothing new in that.

In our first reading we heard how Abraham was called by God to leave his home and 'by faith he set out, not knowing where he was going'. This is a recurring theme in the Old Testament where people are obedient to God and both individuals and whole tribes move into the unknown but with God leading the way.

In our Gospel reading Jesus explains to his disciples that worrying about possessions and concern for food and clothing are unnecessary, as is worrying about the future. He encourages them to have faith in the knowledge that God will provide for each of them, for each one of us, according to our needs. Easier said than done!

The disciples, too, were on a pilgrimage following Jesus even if they may not have recognised it as such at the time. They left home and family, travelled light, were often not sure where they would sleep or where the spirit would lead them but their faith in Jesus, their yearning to be in his presence, to learn from him, meant that each one of them obeyed the call to follow him.

Pilgrimage has become increasingly popular during the twentieth century as people feel the need to leave the hectic, busy world of work and consumerism behind. They discover the freedom that a simple life brings, where possessions, time and status are left behind.

After this service a group of people will set off on a pilgrimage following in the footsteps of those first six sisters who left Goring 750 years ago. They set out in faith. It will not have been easy for them to leave the familiar for the unknown but they trusted God as they set forth on their journey, on their pilgrimage. It was a journey taken in faith and obedience and in their continued search of a closer relationship with God.

As we set out today it will be slightly different as we know how far we will walk each day and the rough time of our arrival at Burnham Abbey on Saturday. Except for that, our journey will include all the essentials of a pilgrimage.

There will be:

- Time to share stories, to listen to one another
- Time consciously to enjoy and wonder at the beauty of the environment as we walk along the river, through meadows and woods.
- There will also be an extended time of silence after lunch so that we can walk and pray, consciously to make time for God, to reflect and have time for discernment
- time to be in **his** presence, to listen to Him.

As well as the physical walking of a pilgrimage there is also the inner pilgrimage, the inner spiritual journey which is an essential part. For the people who are unable to join us on the walking pilgrimage there is the opportunity to be with us in spirit through prayer. A leaflet is provided so that our journey can be followed on a day by day basis. For those who are walking, to know they are being held in prayer throughout the week will be a gift and a blessing. It is also a way of sharing the journey before we come together on Saturday at Burnham Abbey.

A pilgrimage is not always about arriving at a particular point; it is the journey which is important - a journey taken in faith and in search of a closer relationship with God who walks alongside us each step of the way, today, tomorrow and every day of our lives.

Thanks be to God.



*The Revd Mieke Gaynor, Companion SPB*