

Day Eight: Homecoming

We began our journey to Avila with the reflection that a pilgrimage reflects our sense of being a people on the move, a pilgrim people living in exile, seeking our one true heavenly homeland. Today our pilgrims return home, and this too is a reminder that our earthly home is a temporary thing, an image and foretaste of our final dwelling place in the eternal kingdom of God. Despite this sense of exile, or homelessness, the Second Vatican Council urged us not to neglect our earthly home or our responsibilities towards it. As the great theologians of the Council taught, the world is a graced reality and we as Christians have a God-given duty to labour on its behalf, contributing to its good and striving to build the reality of the kingdom of God in the present moment. As God once advised the Babylonian exiles through the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord
on its behalf, for on its welfare yours depends. (Jeremiah 29:7)

It was this commitment to the world in all its needs and struggles which so fired St Teresa with apostolic zeal, a willingness to pour out her life in prayer and works for the good of others and for the building of Christ's Church. Truly Teresa was a citizen of the world and it is remarkable that her love of God and her thirst for his companionship turned her not from the world but towards it. As we return home and resume our daily tasks we ask Teresa for fresh eyes to see Christ's presence in each of the souls among whom we dwell, to see his purpose in each of the tasks we undertake. This new vision and renewed energy must truly be the legacy of any spiritual experience. As Teresa teaches us at the end of the *Interior Castle*, 'This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of the spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works' (*Interior Castle*, VII. 4.6); and again, 'This is what I want us to strive for, my Sisters: and let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so as to have this strength to serve' (*Interior Castle*, VII.4.12).

Taking Teresa's words to heart, let us then set ourselves to these works with fresh energy and a deepened love for our neighbour. We know from the testimony of Blessed Anne of St Bartholomew that, as Teresa lay dying in Alba de Tormes, she said with characteristic directness and simplicity to the Lord whose presence she so imminently expected: 'It is time to walk.' Let us too walk courageously and confidently with the Lord, labouring to build his kingdom on earth, in confident expectation of our final dwelling place in heaven.

"My Lord, it is time to walk. Very well, Your will be done!"

Pilgrims' Liturgy

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the house of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

(Psalm 84)

We pray for the homeless, the refugee and the exile. We ask that they may find a place of home among us. May our welcome to them reflect all we anticipate of our common citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

We give thanks for all we have received during these days of pilgrimage. We ask that these graces may flow out to all we know and love, all we hold in our hearts, all for whose needs we pray. We give thanks and praise to you.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the grace of this time of pilgrimage. Bless those who have been our companions on the road. Reward those who have given us their hospitality. Help us to leave this place with a deeper love of you and others. Keep us safe on our journeys home, and one day reunite us in our heavenly home, with Teresa, John and all the saints of Carmel. We make this and every prayer, through Christ our Lord. Amen.