

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Help for the journey

In most countries today, travelling is a relatively simple and safe activity thanks to the wonders of air travel, good roads and law and order. Of course, some travellers do fall victim to tragic events, but most people today can travel safely from city to city, and country to country.

In biblical times, however, travel was much more precarious. Journeys were arduous and often dangerous.

Today's responsorial psalm is a blessing prayer for someone about to embark on a difficult journey. The anxiety of the traveller is evident in the opening lines: 'I lift up my eyes to the mountains (through which I must pass); from where shall come my help?' Who will protect me from bandits, wild animals, scorching heat during the day and severe cold at night, and many other dangers?

Then follows a beautiful prayer of confidence that the Lord will watch over the traveller

*The Lord will guard you from evil,
He will guard your soul.
The Lord will guard your going and coming
Both now and forever.*

It is a prayer that we can pray today over anyone about to embark on a journey.

Of course, the life of each of us is a journey. It has its troubles and dangers, as well as its moments of joy and discovery. We may not have difficulties travelling from place to place, but on our journey through life we encounter dangers in other ways, like the widow in today's Gospel who was wronged by an evil judge.

How does the Lord guard us on our journey through life? In today's second reading, St Paul give some good insights.

First, the Lord guards us through our teachers. Our teachers can be our parents or grandparents, as well as our teachers in school, and other people. Let us remember their wise words and good example.

Currently, many students are just finishing Year 12 and starting their HSC exams. Hopefully they will remember throughout their lives the teachers who inspired them during their school days.

Secondly, we can be enlightened by the Scriptures (the Bible). As St Paul notes, all Scriptures are inspired by God and can be profitably used for guiding our lives and showing us the path to holiness.

Thirdly, persistent hope-filled prayer will help us on our journey through life.

Many years ago, I was driving past a convent of contemplative nuns in Melbourne. My younger brother was with me in the car, and he asked me, 'what do they do?' I replied, 'They pray.' Then he asked, 'Wouldn't it be better if they went out of their convent, and gave practical help to people?' Well, we all recognise the need for our Church community to help people in practical ways, but we must also acknowledge the limitations of that help. As Jesus says in another part of the Gospels, some situations can only be healed 'by prayer' (Mark 9:29).

We can be confident that, through the example of our teachers, through the Scriptures, and through prayer, the Lord will guard our going and coming, both now and forever.

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