

LENTEN REFLECTIONS

2024 SERIES

It is With You That We Journey, O Christ

FROM A FAITH PERSPECTIVE COLUMN WRITTEN BY SISTER EILEEN WHITE, GNSH

*It is with You that we journey,
O Christ, as we walk with our
steps in Your footprints.*

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O Christ.*

We sing this hymn as we begin our worship each Sunday of Lent, in the chapel of the Medical Mission Sisters, where I go to Catholic Mass regularly.

Lent, the Christian season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, is 40 days of preparation for Easter. The melody and words of this hymn remain in my subconscious wherever I go and whatever I am doing.

In winter snow, I have often been able to walk only if I could step into the bootprints of someone who made a path ahead of me.

We Christians believe that Jesus' footprints are the ones we need to step into –

in the way we treat people,

in our willingness to spend ourselves for others,

in our forgiving hurts and learning from failures,

in our acceptance of a different viewpoint,

in our embrace of those rejected by others,

in our love of God demonstrated in love of neighbor, friend, stranger, enemy.

In prayer, the melody and the words haunt me and I ask myself, "Am I walking with steps in the footprints of Jesus the Christ?"

Recently two of our Sisters died – within a week of each other. They had lived a long life – each of them 80 years plus.

We were, in a way, prepared for them to die, as they had gone on hospice care a little while ago and were no longer present to us in the way that they had been once.

But one is never really prepared for a loved one to die. Death is such a leveler! No one gets out of it. No one knows how to do it since we've never done it before. No one knows what is on the other side of it, though we all have ideas about heaven inherited from our scriptures or from sermons and lessons we have absorbed.

What is truly wonderful about my community's after-death rituals is that they provide us with the chance to tell and hear stories about the Sister whose loss we mourn.

Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart

In the sharing of stories, we find her very present – in some ways more complete than when she was physically present to us, since there are so many awesome and funny and inspiring aspects of her life that we cannot have known before. We get a tiny glimpse of the whole person whom God knows and loves.

The Christian promise regarding death is that in spite of it, we will live forever. Wow! What a hopeful thought! Many of us imagine ourselves reunited with loved ones who have “crossed over” before us.

Even in death, *It is with You that we journey, O Christ, as we walk with our steps in Your footprints.*

No doubt life has led us or will lead us in some way in the difficult-to-step-into footprints of the Christ – making us take up whatever cross comes our way, inviting us sometimes (often?) to embrace suffering or darkness when there is no way to keep it at bay. Our faith urges us to “die” to whatever keeps us from living with Jesus, and also to count on an eventual resurrection – a new life unlike what we have known here on Earth but holy and real and wondrous.

We get to practice these “footprints” occasionally or see them acted out. I have seen awful suffering and abandonment and hopelessness in another person’s life and later, much later, seen healing and starting over with “new life” so good we could never have imagined it to be possible.

Recently, at the funeral of one of our Sisters, I heard the priest presider say, “Words are important, but not as important as living those words.” I thought about the many columns, prayers, presentations, poems, and letters I have written and spoken and sometimes preached, and about this hymn’s invitation to step into Christ’s footprints.

Am I living those words – stepping into Jesus’ footprints?

At the funeral, we heard how Sister really “lived the words” – words that had been used to describe her and words of the New Testament scripture passages she had selected before her death.

Words like kind, generous, friendly, aware, loving, sincere, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Separated from me, you can do nothing.”

Yes, she lived the words. I am sure that I am not the only one who heard the stories of her life and through them the voice of God, calling us to “live the words” as best we can – this Lent, this Easter, all our days of journeying with Jesus, stepping into his footprints.

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