



Adventures With God:

Living the Camino in Daily Life

Fr. Chris Gorton

Leaving Home

On my phone I have photographs of each time I have set off to walk some of the Camino. The first was taken by my mum at 10:46 on the 25th of July 2012 (the Feast of St James) outside the train at Manchester Piccadilly Station. The second, again taken by my mum, is outside the house my parents moved to after 39 years of living in what had been the family home as I grew up and had always been able to come home to whatever was happening in life at that time. I still had the same bedroom there that I had when I was small and it was a safe place to come back to. But my parents had moved to a bungalow which was much better for my dad, and as it turned out, for my mum as well. So the second stage of the Camino set off from a different place, the new home for my parents and the photograph was taken outside that front door at 17:32 on the 2nd of August, 2013. The third is taken at Manchester Airport at 5:56 on the 3rd of August 2014, again by my mum, and the most recent is taken this year outside the presbytery in Colne with two of my nephews (Ben and Deon) and was taken by my sister at 10:36 on the 1st of June, 2016. There is also a 'Selfie' that I took on the 2nd of June at 10:50 outside Pamplona cathedral as I made the first step on what I hoped would be the last leg of the journey to Santiago. If you are wondering what happened in 2015 that is another part of the story and another part of the Camino all together that I will share with you as part of our journey together.

Leaving home, taking the first step, it becoming a reality. All a bit scary as well as very exciting. Whenever we are



preparing for something we spend a lot of time thinking about it, preparing for it, talking to people about it, and then there comes a point when it is time to take the first step! I had felt called to walk the Camino for some time, I had talked a lot about it to my family and friends, I had prepared, read up about it, trained with the walking but then came the moment to start the journey: to leave home. And I didn't realise then that when I left home on the feast day of St James in 2012 that by the time I would arrive in Santiago not only would my parents have moved house but both of them would have died and I would no longer have a family home in that way and never will have again. More than ever for me as a result the idea of being a pilgrim on this earth speaks to me in the way I view daily life "our true homeland is in heaven...'

So I would like to share with you some of the thoughts as I left home each time to walk more of the Camino through parts of my diary, because each leaving of home was different, bringing with it different thoughts and challenges, hopes and worries that I think many of us have to face in daily life but not everybody has the chance to reflect upon through walking the Camino and a big part of why I want to share these thoughts is that they may help you.

Back then to the 25th of July 2012 and my first entry in the journal I was encouraged to keep by my Spiritual Director, Fr David Elder, and I am very glad he did!



Day One Rawtenstall to Paris! 25/07/2012

"Although I have been planning, packing and training for the last few months and felt called to walk the Camino for a number of years it was not yesterday evening I realised that I would be setting off today. I was fully prepared to postpone the trip depending on the hospital visit with my dad (and mum) yesterday. As it turned out it went as well as could be expected and so last night I celebrated the vigil mass of St James with my mum and dad, went for a meal with my nephews (and sister and mum) and this morning set off on the Camino.

Leaving home at 8.30 for Manchester Piccadilly, waved off from there by mum who has waved me off from there to many places and today to London, to Paris and to Le Puy. The first leg of the journey was familiar territory and London was filling up with people for the Olympics. I decided to take the Euro Star so made the whole journey by train. On the way to London two women who marketed cheese sat next to me and talked cheese to each other. I wanted to join in the catch phrase planning (but didn't) . When I arrived at St Pancras International I found myself buying a cheese sandwich (seems like they were very good at their job).



I enjoyed the journey on the euro star, praying the rosary and listening to a few songs. Carrying the walking stick is interesting. Security asked me what it was for. They said I could



catch snakes with it, I said I would pray with it. And I did as I got off the train. I had bought a map of Paris in London and looking at it decided to walk to the hotel (which I was a bit worried about). I also decided that in the morning I would walk to the Gare de Lyons - and now hope to visit St Chapelle and Notre Dame on the way (as well as Holy Trinity and St Mary Magdalene's). The spirit of adventure started to kick I and so far I'm glad it did.



I noticed on the map I could visit the **Sacre Coeur** on the way to the hotel and so I did. Steps, steps, steps and more steps! On a humid evening. Inside there was

a liturgy going on with two people in mitres, plenty of copes and the Gospel procession had people shaking things before and after it (in the shape of a large bed pan). I lit a candle for everyone and prayers "Sacred Heart of Jesus I place all my trust in you' before the statue of the sacred Heart. It was good to call there.

I found the hotel, had a shower, washed the clothes I'd been in (hope they dry), sorted a few things out and decided to go out for one thing to eat. I asked the receptionist to recommend somewhere good but not too expensive which he did (I'm trying to speak as much French as possible). The meal was good and took two hours which meant that I had to take my time. I read and looked at the map for the morning. I returned to the hotel to write the journal. I was going to do it



in the hotel room but really wanted to sit with a beer outside a cafe with music playing so that is what I did.

Although I am on my own I don't feel that at all. I feel family, friends, parishioners and Christ is with me. Who knows what will happen but this is a proper adventure!

Day 2 Paris - Le Puy en Velay

I am sat on the Rue St Raphael near to the cathedral and the gite where I am staying tonight. Today has been an incredible day in many ways with so much in such a short period of time. I got up early for breakfast and tried my best to speak French as I intend to do as much as possible. After breakfast around eight I began walking through Paris. Past the church across from the hotel to the Pigalle! Quiet by day but busy at night (as is Montmartre as I was woken with songs of celebration at 1.00 - very gauche). From there I walked to the church of the Holy Trinity and St Mary Magdalene's and St Augustine's. All were closed - I was too early! From there I found a church that was open and much appreciated before going to **the Arc de Triumph** and walked down the Champs Elysees - they were putting the seating away from the Tour de France finish a few days before - first British winner in the 109 years, Bradley Wiggins!



I found the Louvre and then crossed the Seine. The first view of the Seine was also the first view of the Eiffel Tower. I had hoped to see inside the Chapelle Royal and thought I wouldn't get in Notre Dame but ended up the other way





around! Perhaps it was a good reminder some things can't be and medieval pilgrims didn't get in either. For me it was because the queue was too big and no next to negotiate at! Outside **Notre Dame** I found point zero where distances are measured

from in France and the starting point in Paris. I also was allowed in to pray and lit a candle for everyone. I walked to the Gare de Lyons - the train was delayed which meant I missed my connection but I checked in French and could use the ticket on the next train. During the second train journey I was feeling a bit hungry and tired but soon perked up when I saw **Le Puy**. It



took a little bit but found Tourist info and the cathedral. I asked in the sacristy about Mass in the morning and the credential. They invited me to concelebrate which is brilliant.



There are lots of steps up to the cathedral - lots and lots! I found the Gite St Francis and was pleasantly surprised to have a room to myself. Did some walking, sorted everything out for the morning and then found the starting point for tomorrow. And now here I am in a beautiful, quiet street about to have some carbonara and feeling very glad to be here and ready to begin

the Camino. I need to savour the moment in prayer as a great gift from God. The walking stick is a definite talking point!"



So there I am ready to take my first ever step on the Camino and completely out of my comfort zone. For a start this was the first time I had ever set off on an adventure like this on my own.

On previous occasions I had a friend walking with me. So why not this time. Well in some ways that was a practical consideration but in other ways it was guided by spirituality books that I had read about the Camino that said it was good to set off on your own because there was more chance then that you would be open to meeting other people and the opportunities that would be presented to you along the Way. So that was one way that I 'left home', a way that I left what I was used to doing and the way I Was used to doing it. I took great comfort in the hymn 'Alone with none but Thee my God' in making that decision and offer it to you as a powerful way trusting our journey through life itself to God. Here is the hymn with a few thoughts I made about it in completing the Camino this summer, four years after that first step along the Way:

Alone with none but Thee my God I journey on my way,
What need I fear when Thou art near, O King of night and day.
More safe am I within Thy hand, than if a host did round me stand.



My destined time is fixed by Thee, and death doth know his hour,
Did warriors strong around me throng, they could not stay his power.
No walls of stone can man defend, when Thou Thy messenger does send.

My life I yield to Thy decree and bow to Thy control,
In peaceful calm for from Thine arm no power can rest my soul.
Could earthly omens e'er appal a man that heads the heavenly call.

The child of God can fear no ill, his chosen dread no foe.
We leave our fate with Thee and wait, Thy bidding when to go,
'Tis not from chance our comfort springs, Thou art our trust, O King of Kings

'Morning Prayer Hymn, Breviary Week 3'

Written in the front of my diary as I began the Camino in 2012 alone with contact details for emergencies and the opening verse 'To be a pilgrim'

He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,
Let him in constancy follow the Master,
There's no discouragement, nor shall he once relent,
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.'



The Camino 25th July 2012—AMDG

"And this is how the Camino began. With a prayer. Not just any prayer, but a prayer of trust and abandonment that gave the confidence to take a risk, to answer a call, to set off on a journey. The hymn from the breviary I knew well from college but it took on a whole new significance when I was contemplating for the first ever time walking on my own rather than with friends, and in another country where I would have to speak a different language and begin a journey that I knew would last for years even if I ever completed it. So a powerful prayer! An invaluable prayer. To be able to say 'Alone with none but Thee my God' to be able to set off on a journey without anyone else, to recognise that whether I thought I was walking on my own or walking with other people I was ultimately trying to walk with God. An invitation to trust 'What need I fear' well quite lot if I was honest and yet the invitation was to trust rather than to fear. To be safer in the Hand of God rather than surrounded with my own forms of protection, whatever form they can take. Safe in the hand of God, a beautiful no powerful image that brought peace, as Jesus said, a peace the world cannot give, if only I could trust it. A recognition that no matter what walls of self defence I might try and build they are pointless against the will of God and actually I will be much more at peace working with that will than trying to protect myself against it. A willingness to give my life to God 'to bow to Thy control'. For somebody who likes to be in charge to hand



that power over to God recognising the origin of all power and authority and being open to experiencing the peace that can bring. A desire to answer God's call for me and I think that a recognition that God is constantly calling me to more, to be more like Christ and presents opportunities for me to answer this call, one way being the Camino. An invitation not to fear. I say it again: not to fear! How often in life are we invited to fear: to fear the past and what has happened and what we have done; to fear the present and how it is affecting us; to fear the future and whatever it might bring. What an extraordinary promise to be invited not to fear, what a difference it can make to our lives. For me the invitation to walk the Camino was a very definite invitation from God not to fear but to trust often in very definite, physical situations with a 'peaceful calm.' Knowing that if only we trust then we will be safe in the arms of God. How often can we wander off and then wonder why we feel unsafe trying to rely on ourselves rather than God and then turn round and ask 'Where is God?' And the answer is always 'I am here, right here, waiting for you like the loving Father awaits the prodigal Son.' In contrast to be able to leave our fate with God, to let Him decide, to allow ultimately His will to be done. We pray this so often in the 'Our Father' and what a difference it can make if we truly mean it. Our hope is in God, not chance and if you are going to walk the Camino then you better believe that one hundred per cent if not as you start but hopefully as you go along. This hymn is a rallying cry for pilgrims, along with the classic 'To Be a Pilgrim' and as I will say time and again in these reflections what matters is that we recognise that we are all pilgrims. Yes some of us have had the



privilege of walking a physical pilgrimage but that is secondary to realising that whoever where are, whatever situation we find ourselves in life, we are pilgrims on this earth and this hymn is a rallying cry for us. So I invite you to read the hymn again now and make it your prayer as a pilgrim wherever you are and let it guide you in the decisions that are important in your life at this time."

So accepting the invitation to walk with God, to trust in God, to be open to God rather than to be surrounded with all the coping mechanisms that I have at home, the comfort zone that can often stop us being aware of God's presence and His will for us. Leaving home, leaving things that important to us including our family and friends can help us on pilgrim journey on earth. Because all that we have and all that we are comes from God and this world is transitory and even those we love deeply will only be with us for a certain amount of time on this earth but we do believe that we will be reunited with them one day in God's presence one heaven. I think this is part of the Arrival but that is for later, for now it's about leaving home and all that entails!



Although I was leaving I home I was determined to begin with to take as much of it with me as I possibly could. I had bought a rucksack in Keswick whilst there with a Year 10 group at Castlerigg. The shop assistant stopped me from buying an even bigger rucksack than I did on the grounds that I would only fill it up. And how right that person was. In fact I filled it with as much as I could, including extra food that meant I thought I wouldn't have to buy much to

begin with and I could be pretty self sufficient. That is one thing I don't think you can be on the Way or perhaps if you try to be you miss out on so many encounters and possibilities as a result. So the rucksack was a way of trying to bring home with me, to bring some of the comfort zone with me and as a result it was very heavy. Too heavy in fact. After about three days I decided that I was carrying far too much and next time I wouldn't carry as much. I then had a word with myself which is a useful thing to do on the Camino from time to time, back to the prodigal son and the idea of 'coming to our senses.' On this occasion I had a word with myself that went along the lines of 'So you are going to carry too much for the next seven days and then sort the problem out next time. Why not sort it out now?'



And then I had a profound experience of prayer, by praying a very simple prayer: 'Lord help me find a bin to empty some of the things out of my rucksack and help me find someone I can give the good clothes to!' Within twenty minutes my prayers had been answered. There was a small boy selling lemonade who I gave the clothes to for his family (I hope I explained that correctly in French) and then there was a bin. The rucksack suddenly felt much lighter and it seemed possible that I would be able to keep walking and enjoy the walking. Now to be honest this year my rucksack was very heavy, probably too heavy but it had a precious cargo, my mum's ashes and also the equipment to paint an icon of St James along the Way but even this year I had a moment of clearing the rucksack of anything that I didn't need to carry any more

and at the Cathedral in Santiago that included my mum's ashes that I gave to my brother to bring back to England. In fact every time I have walked in the Camino I have left clothes and equipment along the way. On one occasion I had to leave a fleece, a sleeping bag and other equipment on a wall so I left a note to say that anyone who need please help yourself. I never saw it myself, or if I did I wasn't paying attention but there is at least one place on the way where a huge number of clothes are left behind by people who have packed too much.

A major lesson in life for me, to be able to leave things behind that are unnecessary and rather than trying to be self sufficient rely on God. This is what we mean by Providence, that God will provide. Now this can take many forms and is often through the generosity of other people, but let's not reduce it all to the human too quickly. The Camino keeps teaching me about letting go even of that which is dearest to me including the Camino itself in 2015, to trust that God will provide rather than trying to be self sufficient, and to have a simple child like trust in God in the way that I pray; And having to communicate in another language meant that I had to simplify down a lot of what I wanted to say.

I had studied French in school but that was some time ago and as my favourite subject was music that was where my interests lay. And I can be a bit too pragmatic asking 'what is the purpose of learning something unless you are going to use it?' I had a French pen friend at school but he spoke very good English and I let him so never really made the most of speaking French when we went on an exchange (but I was only thirteen). And since school the only language I had learnt was New



Testament Greek which was very useful for reading the New Testament in the original text and I enjoyed doing but not much use for a going on holiday in Greece. I had experienced role speaking different languages in Taize, a monastery in France where young people from all over the world gather each summer, but it never really occurred to me that I should make the effort especially as most people speak English (the Camino quickly changed my understanding of that). So the idea of going to another country on my own having to speak another language really was leaving home, taking me out of my comfort zone. If you can speak another language well then you will remember what it feels like to sing with, searching for words and speaking again like a small child. If you are beginning to learn a language the, good n you, and you will know exactly how it feels to try and communicate with a few words whilst your head is full of what you are wanting to say.

The result of trying to communicate in another language can be frustrating, entertaining for you or the other people in the conversation, it can be humiliating (depending on how the native speaker responds to your attempts or how you react when you make mistakes) and it is wonderful. It is a way of taking ourselves out of the centre of a situation, a way of no longer being in control of the situation and for someone like me a great lesson in life. I remember when I was a university chaplain the students wants to take me on the Go Ape high wire course in Grisedale forest because they 'wanted to see a control freak lose control'!! God bless them! Well all they needed to see was me getting off the euro tunnel train in Paris setting off to the hotel to see that. Being out of control! That



can sound so dangerous, and it certainly can be but if we give the control over to God that is a wonderful thing to do! By having to communicate in a different language I had to learn to let go, to trust that bit more and not ways have all the words I wanted in a situation. It meant I had to rely on other people to make an effort to communicate with them in another language, their language not my own, to simplify what I had to say, to accept that I can't understand everything and that I am going to make mistakes, to realise that there is another way of doing things. In other words a great way of putting us in a good relationship with those around us. I remember a group of Italian children telling me how easy it is to speak Italian! Well yes if that is your native language but not if you've just come from nearly two months speaking Spanish and French and you are searching for the words. But they were children! I think for me language has been a good way to try and learn how to see things from another point of view (another way was to try and walk some of the Camino del Norte in the other direction but more of that latter and that is not something I would recommend).

Everybody speaks their own language! We may have the same common set of words no expressions in English for example, but we can use them in many different ways and mean many different things. To make the effort to learn the language of our family, our friends, those at work, those who live around us is very important and something that I have thought more about having to do that literally on the Camino first of all its French and then with Spanish. When I have tried to do that doors open in a wonderful way because ultimately I



am relying on God and the gifts that He gives when we need them most. I never considered myself a Linguist, and still don't today, but see that being able to communicate in different languages is a gift from God for the Camino which can help me see the other's point of view that bit more and simplify a lot of what I want to say, particularly in prayer! Another way of leaving home and leaving our comfort zone!

Certainly a lot was to happen before I returned to the Camino again the following year. For one thing my parents had moved house. They had left a home where they had lived and brought up my brother, sister and myself for 39 years. They had moved to a bungalow near my sister which was easier for them but at the same time I think it must have been very hard for them to leave 'Burnley Rd' as we referred to where we had lived for so long. I remember clearing my room at home before the summer, so it must have been before I set off on the Camino the first time and then not long after I returned, the move took place. It actually took place on the anniversary of my ordination, the 15th of September and I was looking after my dad over in Colne as the move took place. He wasn't well and I took him to Blackburn A&E and he ended up being in hospital for a time. I also remember in the midst of the move as most of the family where there we celebrated mass for my anniversary in the new house. It is a great gift to be able to celebrate mass in different places something I treasure from doing every Monday with my parents and also in many different locations with many different people on the Camino as well as in the parish and in different places of pilgrimage around the world.



So I physically left home and whilst I had not lived there full time since the age of eighteen it was a loss, a grief, a letting go of familiar and secure surroundings particularly as we, as priests are very fortunate to have a house provided for us to live in but it is different to a family home. The autumn of 2012 had a number of hospital appointments for my dad and chemotherapy always accompanied by my mum and we took turns to be with her and dad on those occasions. I remember one conversation walking around a reservoir in Blackburn whilst dad had his chemotherapy (he preferred to be on his own for that) about the time when it came for his funeral, where it would take place and would I be OK doing it. Moments of leaving home, moments of having to face a new reality and prepare for it. Looking back now I think that walking some of the Camino was a gift from God to help me face the next part of the journey for our family during the following year.

I remember the phone call. It was the week before Christmas and in the parish we try to go round all the different nursing homes and sing Christmas carols. I had just pulled up in the car park of one of the nursing homes and the phone rang. It was mum to tell me that dad was very ill. She had called the ambulance and understandably wanted me to come home to be there. I arrived before the ambulance and remember dad being taken out in a chair and I thought that he would never come back to that house. We followed the ambulance to the hospital and then entered into the world of hospitals, of waiting, of trying to sort out best what to do next. We seemed to be a very long time in A&E and then eventually they found a bed for dad. I stayed at home with my mum the



next few nights and still today I remember him sat at the end of the bed saying that he had some bad news, he was going to die. We were very upset that he had been told without us being there but we had to deal with the immediate and do the best we could for him at that moment in time. It was a few days before Christmas and perhaps many of you have experienced the surreal way the rest of the world is getting all hyped up and your world is going in slow motion seemingly in a very different direction to the festivities going on around.

I made a few phone calls and thanks be to God and to Barabra Lupton we found a place for dad at Nazareth House. His mood changed quite dramatically as he wanted to see the photos of the place I had found on my phone. It transformed that moment for my dad to know that he could be safe in Nazareth House. So we made sure that he was safely settled there the Friday before Christmas and then I drove back to the Parish bringing my mum and dad with me. From the time that I had my own presbytery my mum and dad had always come to be with me for Christmas and New year and Easter as well as the annual holiday to Abersoch. We arrived back in the parish in time for carols around the Christmas tree, a tradition we had started in the parish the first year that I arrived there. It was a very powerful moment bringing me right back to why we celebrate Christmas: Emmanuel, God is with us. The parishioners were a great support and I celebrated all the Christmas masses and with my mum visited Nazareth House every day.

I remember very clearly that when we took my dad there they had to fill in all the paperwork and asked me to



help with the questions. It was hard to ask Dad what he wanted to happen regarding being resuscitated but I remember exactly what he said: 'I just want what God wants!' Such a powerful statement of faith which he also expressed with his devotion to the Divine Mercy. Both my parents were people of great faith and they expressed it in different ways. For my dad he expressed his faith in a traditional way through particular devotions and he had a particular devotion to the Divine Mercy. We brought him a picture for his room and he pointed to where he wanted it to be: directly opposite him so that it was probably the last thing that he looked upon before he died. I had the privilege of anointing him and he received holy communion every day. I remember mum and I taking him to the cathedral one time earlier in the year for the sacrament of reconciliation and that gave him a great deal of peace.

My sister and Tom, Ben Jack and Deon came over during Christmas and we tried to make it as happy as possible for them but every day was dictated by the call at 10.15 to see how dad had been through the night. My brother, Dominic, came up to see dad and we were all gathered for mass on New Year's Day with the parish. It is an extraordinary feeling to be surrounded with such love and prayer and to realise that people were doing everything that they could to help. On the 2nd of January my mum went back home, I think because that was the day they would normally go home after Christmas, but we arranged to meet the next day and she would ring me in the morning. We visited dad that day and there was something that made us feel it might not be long now before he died. But we had thought that on Boxing Day, coming from Nazareth House



to the go with my nephews to the pantomime, and then dad rallied again. I was going to Manchester to see Andrew and Mum was going home. We had both asked him if he wanted us to stay but he didn't so we said night God bless and I went and said evening prayer in the chapel there.

The next day, the 3rd of January 2013, I rang my mum, having slept with one ear open ready to go during the night to Nazareth House. They told her that he had had a comfortable night so we arranged to meet at 1.15pm in the car park of Nazareth House and in the meantime I went for a walk with Andrew. We met at the appointed time and then as we went into dad's room I realised that he had died. It was a shock, no matter how much it was expected, it was a shock. I remember my mum being very upset and I telephoned my sister and my brother and then wait for a very long time for the doctor to turn up. He took so long we had to leave dad there having arranged for one of our local undertakers, Heliwells, to come to look after him. It I had happened. Something I had begun to think about, pray about, write about on the Camino, but now it had happened and my world changed.

The funeral took place the following week and with a lot of help and support, especially Fr Bob Halshaw standing right beside me, I managed to lead the funeral. The homily can be found at the back of this section

Then our family had to come to terms with life without dad being around. On a Monday the tradition on my day off was to celebrate mass with Mum and dad and at that mass to remember family birthdays, anniversaries, people in



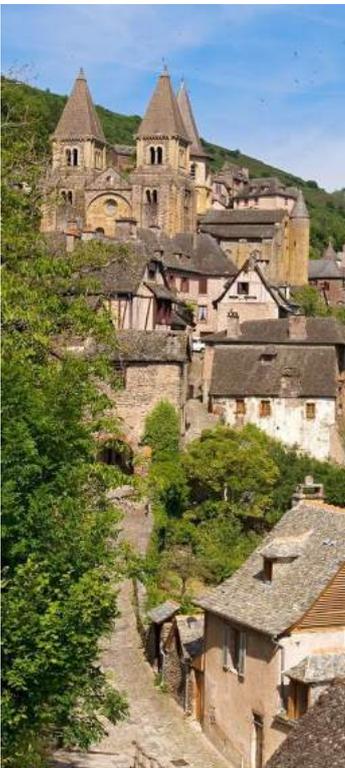
particular need. We continued the tradition with just my mum and myself but at times it would catch me out to look over and see the empty chair where my dad sat. I took some holiday after the funeral which I would do every year after Christmas and did my best to carry on. There was the first of everything: birthdays, wedding anniversary, Holy Week and Easter and the family holiday in Abersoch. The year before had been the last time that dad came on this holiday and I think he was very aware that it would be the last time. In 2007 there was an advertisement for clergy to celebrate the weekend masses in the parish in Abersoch and then to have the house for the week. It was a perfect opportunity to take my mum and dad on holiday and my sister and family stayed near by so we had endless days playing on the beach. It became a very special family time. The week before I set off on the Camino for the second time was the first week that we went to Abersoch without my dad. We certainly made the most of it and had a very special time but it had changed and we were all aware of that. So when I left home for the second time on the Camino a lot had happened and leaving home had taken on a deeper significance. I am struck now as I read the first entry in the diary for 2013 how different it is from the year before and how much it focuses on living in the present moment. It is perhaps worth noting that the front page of my diary for this year again has the hymn 'Alone with none but Thee my God' and the second page has the words of 'To be a pilgrim' and the third page has emergency contact numbers and the phone number for my mum has changed from the one I can still imagine dialling from many different places over the years to one I was



still trying to learn!

Day One Conques - Decazevilles

Today started early, very early - at 4.00am in Dublin Metro Hotel near the airport (which now at 9.15pm seems a long time ago). To airport and flight to Rodez then taxi to Conques. It was very emotional to see Conques again after almost a year since I left the Chemin. I said prayers in the cathedral then bought some supplies and headed off around 11.30am. The first part of the walk was very steep uphill and was a stern start to the journey but then it levelled out and it felt great to be on the



road again. I stopped for prayer during the day and lunch in Nouilhac and there, in the church, was the book I needed for celebrating mass in French. I read the Gospel - the Parable of the Rich Fool. The more I thought about it the more it made me think that we only have today. The rich man thinks of tomorrow, the day after and his retirement but has none of them. In contrast we pray 'Give us this day our daily bread.' But spend a lot of time in the future and in the past.

Met a few people on the way just to say hello. Arrived in Decazeville just after four pm. Pretty much all French including a big family group. Remembered importance of being patient. Went to church but mass not until 10.30 am tomorrow so decided would celebrate at the Gite. Part of me wanted to celebrate quietly on my own but thought

should offer to others. Meal at 7.00m - four couples and me. Do my best speaking French but again important not to be thrown when conversation too fast to join in. Celebrated mass at 8.30pm and three people came. Talked about the importance of the present moment. Afterwards another person came over and talked to me . Hope I understood properly. I talked about the peace of Christ at the centre of everything. So turned out to be a very good first day. Will try and have an early night to catch up on early start.



'We do not have tomorrow, we no longer have yesterday, all we have is now and God is the God of the present moment which means He is right here right now. We are never on our own.'

When I read these words now it makes me stop. It has literally made me stop typing and think about how important it is to come back to living in the present moment. Change, leaving home, the death of someone we love, an awareness of our own mortality can either make us look back and wish to be there or forward and wish to be there when the pain might be different but I think the call is as ever to be in the present moment. I remember seeing a card once that said: 'Do not look for me in the past my name is not I was. Do not look for me in the future my name is not I will be. Look for me here and now because my name is I Am.' Leaving home the first time on the Camino was about trust and being outside a

comfort zone. Leaving home the second time on the Camino was giving time and space to God to help me come to terms with a whole new reality in my life something which the Camino has given me time and again. It is too easy to think that we should just carry on when there are major changes in our life as if everything is the same. It isn't and if we try to behave as if it is then we are living in the past. If we try to adapt too quickly then we are trying to live in the future. If we give time and space to God then we are living in the present moment and allowing Him to walk with us, to guide us on our pilgrim way.

A very good psalm to pray to help us to do this is The Lord's My Shepherd Psalm 23

It is perhaps important to remember that shepherds in the near Middle East at the time that the psalm was written, at the time of Jesus, and still today go at the front of the flock of sheep.

Depending on where we are from we may have an

understanding of a shepherd at the back of the flock with sheepdogs urging the sheep forward. In contrast the middle eastern shepherd leads the way and the sheep follow him or her because they recognise the voice of the shepherd. This



is why we think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd he has gone through suffering and death to show us the way through even the most dangerous and difficult things that we face in life: the suffering and death of those we love and our own suffering and death. In other words we do not have to worry about how we are going to find the way if we entrust it to Jesus, to trust that

He knows the way and allow him to show us the way rather than trying to find the way ourselves.

This is something that I keep learning on the Camino, to trust the signs! In France they are red and white, in Spain they are yellow, and they are there to help keep you going the right way. If you trust the arrows and let them guide you then all will be well. It doesn't mean that all will be easy,



not at all. But there is something about going in the right direction, knowing that someone has walked before you on that way that makes a difference. The glimpse of a yellow arrow or marker when you are just beginning to doubt if you are on the right path is a welcome sight! And the humility to realise that as you haven't seen one for some time despite a number of crossing points where there should be some it's time to admit you are lost and try and find the way back. When we try and follow in the foot steps of Christ then there is a peace, a sense that we have no need to worry because he knows the way. That way is the way of the cross, it is the way of self giving, or living our lives at the service of others and to the greater glory of God so the easiest way to start to find the signs if we think that we are lost is to do an act of generosity and spend some time in prayer. Too often we can complicate life but I think the message of God's Love for us is very simple and it calls us to love in the same way, to follow that way of life.



So the second time that I left home I was taking a real grief with me: the death of my father and the loss of the

family home and, if I'm honest, the realisation that one day I would have to face the death of my mum. But in my mind I was thinking that wouldn't be for a very long time: I think I was building bigger barns for the future like the rich fool there! But doing something physical when we grieve I think can help a great deal. For me to walk and walk and walk does help. Yes to be physically active makes us feel better but if we believe in God then we should believe that as God has created everything this is one way that He can heal us. To have the time to think, to relive certain moments with enough time to linger with memories doing so in the presence of God. Whenever I celebrate a funeral I talk about the importance of looking back in love to remember the person who has died and that when we do this in God's presence it becomes a powerful pray for that person. So making time to remember someone in God's presence, be it at home, in church or on the way, is to invite God into that relationship, to make that relationship one of the present moment. I read an article a few years ago by a priest of fifty years pastoral experience who said that when we pray for those who have died, in God's presence we continue to love them, and they continue to love us. What difference it makes to them we leave in God's loving hands but it makes a big difference to us because it reminds us that not even death can break the chains of love.

When we remember someone in God's presence we are also trusting them to God and trusting ourselves to God. For me walking the Camino, itself a major way of trying to trust in God has been a very important way to remember my parents and grieve for them with hope. One of



the most popular readings that people choose for funerals comes from St Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians where he says "I want you to be quite certain brothers that you do not grieve as those who have no hope!" The theological virtue that is different to optimism because even the most optimistic of people will have to accept not everything happens the way they would like it to do. Hope which allows us to live in the present moment, bringing our loved ones with us in our hearts, knowing that one day we will be reunited with them in eternity but allowing God to decide when that will be. In the meantime I remember my parents in prayer each day not just on the Camino. For my dad I pray the Divine Mercy prayer and for my mum I make sure there are fresh flowers every day in front of the picture of Our Lady in my prayer room.

Going on any pilgrimage is an invitation to trust God with those things that are most precious to us in life. As well as deciding what we should leave behind we also need to decide what we are going to take with us. You can be pretty certain that if someone is walking the Camino for more than a few

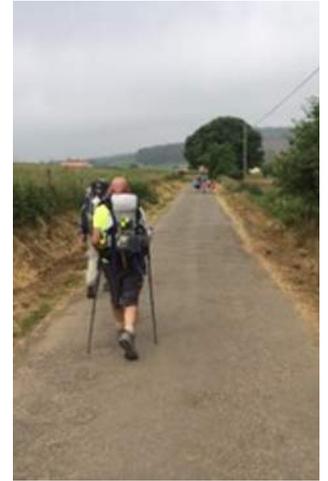


weeks then there is a good reason for it. This time as I was trying to walk back along the Camino del Norte I was looking for a diversion to take me to an Albergue that had a great view of the ocean and as I realised that I was a bit lost I met a lady walking the other way who was also looking for the Albergue. We

decided to walk together and with a bit of help from some twenty first century technology we found the way. But more importantly we walked and we talked. She was from Holland

and had walked the Way for the first time after her husband had died and now she was walking the way each year for a month. As a Mental health practitioner she saw the importance of making time and space. I met a number of people who were walking because someone they loved had died and found that the journey helped them come to terms with the death. This is, of course, the premise of the film *The Way* which is itself based on the stories of different pilgrims.

There is definitely something of the Road to Emmaus about pilgrims walking and talking together, sharing their stories and sharing their grief. People do it in different ways some more openly than others. I remember one pilgrim saying she preferred to walk it out than talk it out and I have met other pilgrims who will take every opportunity to talk about the one they love who has died.



Grief and loss are part of our journey through life. Indeed our very understanding of life as a pilgrimage and our homeland being in heaven means that in some way we realise that there is grief and loss. But if we remember that we are pilgrims rather than rambblers on the journey then we hopefully will also remember that we are not on our own just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Grief can easily blind us. The immediate horror of somebody we love no longer being there in a physical way can shock us so much that it is almost impossible to see the bigger picture. Sometimes other people do not allow us to grieve especially if somebody has lived to an older age or been

suffering. But the world is different without them and that needs time and space and trust in God to come to terms with that and it is different for every single person. But I do believe that if we are prepared to walk with Christ, to allow Him to guide us, to allow him to be the shepherd then we can be free of the worry of how we will cope, what the future might bring, how will we deal with our own mortality or the suffering and death of others that we love. Or we can make it very difficult for ourselves by trying to do it all our own way, by trying to find our own path instead of trusting in the way that God has given us through Jesus Christ. The most popular Gospel that is chosen in the parish for funerals comes from John 14:1-6

'In my Father's house there are many rooms, if there were not then I would have told you so. I am going now to prepare your place and when I have gone to prepared you a place then I shall come back and take you with me. You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said 'Lord, we do not know where you are going so can we know the way?' Jesus said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one can come to the Father except through me.'

What a reassurance from Jesus himself for our loved ones and what a promise made to each one of us and what an invitation to trust in Jesus to allow him to be the Way the Truth and the Life. To allow him to be the Good Shepherd that will guide us through the valley of darkness if we allow him .

Perhaps a powerful prayer for us all us to say is :

'Jesus you are my Good Shepherd

You are my Way, my Truth and my Life,



Guide me every day of my life,
Help me to trust you with my own life,
And to trust you with those I love,
Especially those who have died,
So that everyday is a pilgrimage,
a journey with you following in your footsteps
Living a life of self giving love to the glory of God
That gives me your peace and hope
And in your time eternal rest and peace with all those I love in
your presence forever. Amen.

Leaving home to walk on the Camino means to leave behind a lot of the comforts that we take for granted in daily life. I have a very comfortable life. I have a house to live in, a comfortable bed to sleep in, running water and food to eat. I have so many things that I take for granted every day that leaving them all behind for short time has helped me to appreciate them much more. Not that the life on the road as a pilgrim is that tough but there are a number of differences. Sleeping in a different bed every night can take its toll, sharing a room with a lot of other people can lose its novelty after a bit and not knowing where you are going to sleep that night as you start the day can take a bit of getting used to!. In France it was advised to book ahead and to make sure that I had a place to sleep Gabrielle Borg, a friend of one of our parishioners, Marie, made all the phone calls for me in advance. This was a great help and I think a great comfort to my mum to know where I would be each night. That



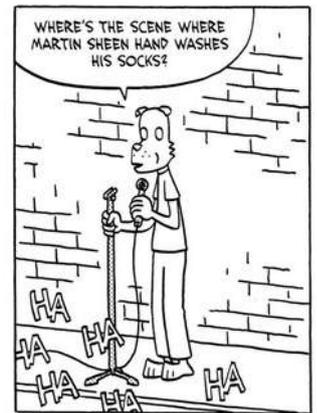
was true for the first three stages of the Camino as I walked from Le Puy to St Jean Pied de Port but not once I entered Spain because then you cannot book the municipal albergues in advance and that does focus the mind a little.

Carrying all that you need means that you have to simplify and carry the absolute minimum or have a very heavy rucksack. I am mindful of Jesus instruction to the disciples to travel light. I think that it helps me to realise how little I actually really need and then I appreciate what I have. A few items of clothing make them very precious and I remember being over the moon at finding a launderette once on the way and enjoying the feeling of all clean clothes. So much I take for granted like a place to charge my phone, the Internet, a phone signal, a shop to buy food. I think that letting go of unnecessary things on the Camino helps me realise how little I need and how much of what I do is provided for by God everyday of my life.

Every Monday morning on my day off I pray a particular morning prayer which is of gratitude for all that I have: literally I try to count my blessings and I always run out of time with this prayer. I begin by thanking God for having a bed to sleep in, to have clothes to wear, running water and food, a sense of purpose in life, family and friends....The more I pray the more I remember that I have so many things to be grateful for that I so often take for granted. And when I particularly think of something that I have taken for granted then I say an act of contrition. I am not totally sure if this prayer came from the Camino but it has certainly been enhanced by it. The simple joy of finding a good place to stay for the night with a good



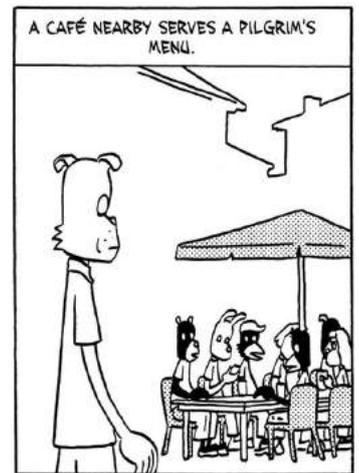
shower (this becomes quite important) and a place to wash your clothes. It doesn't mean that when I come home from the Camino I will try and recreate that environment in my own house but hopefully it does mean that I appreciate that bit more what I have and try and help those who do not have the basic amenities that I so often take for granted.



That is very different from coming back from the Camino and saying to someone who has to sleep rough. 'I know what you mean I was on the Camino!' Absolutely not. That would be patronising as well as untrue. I remember talking with one of the Irish lads I met this year who was staying in the same Albergue (a very good private one for nine euro). I asked him where his friend was? He told me she was sleeping rough so she could know what it felt like to have to do that. In some ways commendable, in other ways I think that needs to be linked with a realisation that we don't know how it would feel unless we really had to. What do I mean by that? I mean that I had my passport with me, I had my credential with me to show that I was a pilgrim, I was walking a major pilgrimage route where there were many others dressed the same way as me and I had my own bank card and the parish bank card and cash. I also had a letter to say that I was a priest and whilst I never used it for accommodation I knew that I had it there for an emergency!

The same is true if someone tries to be a medieval pilgrim on the Camino in the 21st Century. I am very happy to be a twenty first century pilgrim with all the help that brings in terms of good walking shoes, rucksack, medicines, roads,

communication. I don't think that there is much wisdom in trying to be like someone else on a pilgrimage. Better by far and more challenging to present ourselves as who we are on a pilgrimage. Sometimes it is enough if you have an en-suite bathroom to just have to wait for a time, or share a toilet with many other people, or only be able to have a very quick shower so there is enough hot water for everyone. Or to eat what is put in front of you. In many places there is a pilgrim menu, often very reasonably priced at around nine euro. But there isn't much choice and if you are on a budget then it is a good discipline to eat what is available and be grateful for it. Some people stayed in hotels, some stayed in Albergues, some stayed in tents along the way. I think everyone was trying to make a pilgrimage and what I love about the word 'pilgrim' in English is that it actually has the word 'grim' in it!

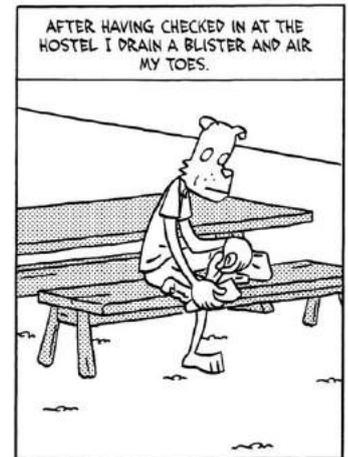


You know it can be quite grim getting up at five thirty in the morning when it is still dark and having to load your rucksack making sure that you haven't forgotten anything in a dorm full of people without the light on! It can be a bit grim



when you really want a bottom bunk but have to take the one allocated to you by ticket which is a top bunk or to think that you had the room to yourself and come back to it being full of people or someone who has perhaps not had a wash for a time! It can be just a bit grim when you want to do some washing but someone else has used all the clothes pegs and then by the time you can put stuff out

it is not dry so you have to have it with you in the dorm overnight (and come to think of it that would make it fair for other people!) It can be a bit grim when you think you have only four kilometres to go and because of where the Albergue is you have another fifteen to go! There are many ways that it can be grim on the Camino but that is part of the journey something that you very quickly get used to and accept as part of the journey. The bigger picture, the destination, the joy of simply being on the Camino, meeting other people, the wonderful places and sites that you see, the great encounters, the times in prayer all make the difficult moments that bit less difficult. Hopefully it has made me that bit more appreciative of what I have, aware that many people in the world do not have even the most basic necessities in life, and that I should be who I am on the pilgrimage and accept the 'grim' parts' as best I can!



All part of leaving home and my beloved comfort zones! So the third time that I set off on the Camino was different again. First of all it was to be for a slightly longer time. The first year I walked for ten days on the Camino, the second year for eleven and this year the plan was to walk for eighteen. I say plan because one thing that I have learnt on the Camino is that whilst it is important to have a plan it is equally important to give that plan over to God so that it becomes a flexible plan rather than a rigid plan. Also, whilst we all missed dad very much we were having to carry on with our lives as a family. We went to Abersoch for the week before I set off on the Camino

and then began the journey again:

Front Page of Diary
The Camino - Part 3
Lectoure - Pamplona
Summer 2014

'Trust Surrender, Believe, Receive!'

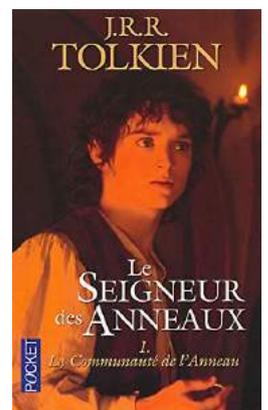
Today is a travel day to get to Lectoure where I finished walking last summer. Very early start at 2 a.m. as my mum, as ever, took me to the airport. It's a great gift that she can enjoy the



adventure and she and all the family are in my heart (just lit a candle for them in the Cathedral at Ages) where I am sitting writing this while I wait for a few hours for the bus to Lectoure.

A good start, having to wait. More and more I am used to the immediate email text Amazon next day delivery. It makes me impatient and think that I am in control so whilst it is hard to wait it is good too, as well to begin again, little by little to become a pilgrim!

I had ordered 'Lord of the rings' part one in French it had not arrived by Friday. I went for a last minute next day delivery and just before I needed it, the book arrived! An Abrahamic moment! I decided yesterday to change the ending to this summers walk and go for Pamplona! It makes sense but might be a bit of a challenging/ risk finishing and making the plane in Biarritz. Finishing in Pamplona then getting to Biarritz I would never dream to do that 20 years ago. What an adventure to even think about it! Last night my head was full of bus timetables and excitement and frustration that I couldn't get tickets booked. I had to leave some things undone. I calmed down as I remembered the reflective prayer 'trust, surrender believe receive' and repeated it time and again.



St Francis talked of leaving some of the field unploughed. I think this is something I need to do more to make sure God has

space to be at work in my life: my ideas my plans, the parish, with my family and friends in fact everything. So in this unploughed time today I ask God to give me the courage and the wisdom to do that all the time and be fully open to all that He wants and needs to give me and teach me. And I commend myself to the protection of Our Lady as I travel towards Lectoure and take up the Camino again and ask her protection on all my family especially my mum. It is a very special moment to look at the blank pages in this book wondering what will be in them in two and a half weeks. Lord help me to remember that everything comes from you and goes back to you and in you we live and move and have our being. Amen!



I'm struck by the front page of my diary for this year. The words come from a reflective prayer I know from "Pray as You Go" a very good daily meditation available on the internet put together by the Jesuits. Trust, surrender, believe, receive. It is powerful way of praying that you may find very helpful in allowing you to be able to 'leave behind' certain things in life and hold up to God what is precious to you. So as an act of letting go, as a way of leaving your comfort zone why not make some time in prayer, still yourself in God's presence asking the Holy Spirit to anoint you and using your breathing as the rhythm for the prayer repeat the words again and again: trust, surrender, believe, receive! As you do don't be disheartened if

different thoughts come to mind. I think we can be very hard on ourselves when we say that we are distracted in prayer and not recognise the importance of holding what is in our minds and hearts in God's presence. So if something that is not very important comes to mind in prayer let it be there in God's presence and be absorbed in the rhythm of 'trust surrender, believe, receive!' On the other hand if something very important comes to mind in prayer, again hold it in your mind and in your heart in God's presence and let those words be poured over that situation, that person, that grief, that pain, in fact whatever it may be that matters. Trust it to God, surrender it to God, believe that God is with you in this moment, and be open to the graces He will give you from this time of prayer.

It is a rhythmic prayer that works very well when you are walking but it is equally effective when sat at home or in church or anywhere else for that matter. It is a way of abandoning ourselves to God, of letting Him be in control of our lives, a spiritual way of leaving our home to walk with Christ. This invitation is made to us everyday and when we accept it then I believe it brings the peace of Christ; trust, surrender, believe, receive. This has certainly been my experience on the Camino but it is hard to let go, it is hard to trust, it is hard to believe and it is hard to receive. I remember this year as I was walking, thinking that perhaps I would email Martin Sheene and thank him and his son for the film 'The Way' and tell him a little of the story of how this year I was taking my mum's ashes to Santiago. This was something that my mum and I had discussed before she died and made the journey this year particularly significant. As I thought about this I began to think



whether I should then keep her ashes with me as I carried on walking or give them to my brother to take back to England. I argued different ways about what best to do and why and then realised that I had to let go. Yes take them to Santiago but then I needed to let go of them, to hand them over, to trust surrender, believe, receive.

Much of leaving home, our comfort zone to go on pilgrimage I think is a willingness to be open to the plan that God has for us in our life at that particular moment in our lives. Yes today God has a plan for you and for me. It may be that we embraced His plan for us yesterday or in the past or it may be that we missed that opportunity but each day I believe that God presents us with a plan, a possibility, a new beginning. If I may use a modern analogy for a moment: it is a bit like a satellite navigation system in a car. You may well be familiar with them but just in case you are not then they are very useful devices to help us find a destination. You type in where you want to go, the device itself works out from where you are how best to get there and as you drive it will tell you when to turn left and right and so on. Now if you decide to ignore the 'sat nav' as they are called, they do not sulk and say 'well suit yourself you do it your own way.' No as long as you keep the destination in they will constantly keep recalculating a route for you no matter how many times you turn the wrong way. In that way they are infinitely patient and I believe that is how God is with us in our pilgrimage through life! There are many times when I have set off in another direction thinking that I know better than God. Sometimes we might be able to discern that in the same way as when you play the hide and seek games with



children and the further they are away from the object the colder they are! Other times it might just be that you feel a bit lost, as if life is not going in the right direction but then we need to be aware of whether that is a flexible plan open to God or a rigid plan that is our definition of success or failure. What is of greatest importance is that God is looking for a way to get us back on the road in the right direction. Not everybody has a road to Damascus experience like St Paul but if we are open to listening to the voice of God then I firmly believe that He will guide us.

But that means being open to the voice of God and choosing to listen to the voice of God in contrast to the many other voices and opinions around us. When somebody uses a sat nav then they can choose which voice to listen to for directions. To a greater or lesser extent we can do the same in life. But we are called to listen to the voice of God and this can be presented to us in many different ways particularly in the person of Christ himself. And we have the teaching, hearings, life, suffering death and resurrection of Jesus in our Gospel accounts. We have the life of Jesus at work in the Church with all the reflection and teaching that comes from that. We experience Jesus personally in the Sacraments and in the community of the Church and those who have been given gifts and charisma by the Holy Spirit to keep the Church close to Christ. To make a conscious decision to discern what the will of God is for each one of us: this is the pearl of great price, the great treasure!

In doing this we have a very good example in the Magi who came from the East to worship the new born King in



Bethlehem. At the time of the birth of Jesus there were many astronomers who looked to the stars with a particular purpose: to discern the will of God. This is very different to a horoscope column in a newspaper, this is about discerning the will of God. To do this immediately suggests the desire to do the will of God which it self can be a challenge! Sometimes we might prefer not to know what God's will is for us because of how much it will cost but there is the peace in that! The Magi are often referred to as the 'wise men' and their wisdom comes from trying to discern the will of God. Part of that is being prepared to leave behind our comfort zones whatever they may be at a particular time. And after three stages for me I think there was a danger that the Camino itself was becoming a comfort zone!

On day four of the first stage of the Camino I thought that I would have to go home, that might be the only part of the Camino I would be able to walk that year because I needed to be home with my dad. I had resigned myself to letting go of the Camino but as it turned out I didn't have to on that occasion. And after three years of walking, Santiago was in my sights. I had worked out that it could be possible to finish the Camino to Santiago in 2015 if I took a few extra days. That plan was hatched as I walked from Lectoure to Pamplona at the same time as I was praying trust, surrender, believe, receive. It was achievable and I made plans accordingly. I was to start early in August and be back just before my anniversary of ordination and my mum was going to meet me there. She knew how important the Camino was to me and really wanted to meet me there. She had never flown until a few years before and never on her own but she was prepared to make her own



special pilgrimage to Santiago to be with me for that moment and that would have been wonderful. The flights were booked, all that could be arranged was done. And for my birthday Mum bought me a pen which had Camino 2015 engraved on it and my nephews bought me a wonderful book to be the diary. And they both remained in my prayer room throughout 2015 with my walking stick and shell and not a single word was written in the book or a single step taken on the Camino that year.

Some times we hear what we need to hear from God through other people, probably far more than we realise if we are open to it. Around the March time of 2015 there was a meal with the Cafod volunteers in our parish and Anne Marie Coppok who had been the Cafod co-ordinator for the diocese. She had walked some of the Camino with her husband the year before and loved it but he now had cancer so she was telling me that they would not be able to walk any more and that they were called to walk another Camino this year. I was struck by those words that became very true for myself as well.

Over the next few months it became apparent that my mum was not well. During Holy Week she was in hospital for tests that first gave us good news but then the week after left things less conclusive. Suddenly there was talk of cancer again this time in relation to my mum. But she was younger than my dad, women usually live longer and she was full of energy! She was ill. So certainties started to slip away bit by bit during the next few months. I remember celebrating the Holy Week and Easter liturgies with the great help of Fr Antony and Luke (now a seminarian for the diocese) against the backdrop



of my mum being ill, potentially terminally. It brought back to mind the Christmas celebrations when my dad was in Nazareth House. Then there was the waiting for a hospital appointment because the consultant wanted to know whether there was cancer there or not. So we entered a strange time of trying to do what needed to be done and at the same time make special journeys to places that my mum loved to go. Pilgrimages in their own way to the Lake District, to Rivington, to 'Another Place' the sculpture on Crosby Beach by Anthony Gormley and to where they filmed Last of the Summer Wine. A few months before in October 2013 she had been part of the parish pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi and the year before to the Holy Land. And now we were having to wait. The appointment for the hospital came early in May and the date for the operation was set for the 1st of June.



During this time I had been asked to chair the group planning for the Year of Mercy celebrations in the diocese and we had decided to use an image by Elizabeth Wang that shows Jesus sat on a bench with his arm around someone. It was a powerful image that spoke of God's love and mercy when we need it most. I think of this



image because the week before the operation I sat with my mum in the waiting room for the pre op when everyone else had gone and she had to wait because there was a problem. All

I could do was to sit with my arm around her, the two of us, well no, actually I felt that Christ was with us there too. So she had to be in hospital for the few days before the operation. I remembering asking if I could take her later in the day so we could visit Rivington one of her favourite places. I did a lot of driving in 2015. She was allowed out for the weekend and we had a family meal and then I took her back on the Sunday evening ready for the operation on the Monday.

On the day she had to wait a very long time before being taken down to theatre and I remember being sat with her. The surgeon came and we talked about how dad had been told bad news on his own and if that was then, this time I wanted to be there, so he took my mobile number and I walked mum as far as I could to the operating theatre and then went straight from there to pray at Holy Name Church. I wasn't there long and the phone rang. It was the surgeon to say that there was nothing that could be done. It was cancer of the gall bladder and that with chemotherapy she could have six months to live, without it would be six months. I remember exactly where I was. I couldn't ring my brother or sister until I had told my mum so I went back to the ward and sat in the empty cubicle waiting for them to bring mum back. Again I remember feeling that I was not on my own. They asked me to come to the recovery room and there I had to tell my mum the news.

She spent the next two weeks in hospital and then we arranged for her to go to Nazareth House for a time so that she would feel well enough to be home. At that time we started talking about her living with me some of the time and



at home some of the time. She came to the presbytery on the 17th of June and then began an extraordinarily special time in my life. She stayed with me until she died on the 21st of November, 2015. During that time she tried chemotherapy, but apparently gall bladder cancer is very resilient to treatment, so she decided at the end of August to stop the treatment. On one particularly occasion she was very poorly when I returned from a friends silver jubilee mass and I thought then she was going to die. So did she as she wrote a lovely letter at that time that I keep very safe. In June and July we went out in the car as much as possible and found a place near the house that had a wonderful view that she loved to visit. I drove there the day before Christmas when I picked up her ashes to take them home. We tried to go to Abersoch but she was poorly and we had to come home early and she was in hospital for a few days.

August was spent in the bungalow as Fr Antony was covering for the summer because I was meant to be on the Camino. Oh yes the Camino, well as soon as I got the phone call from the surgeon on the 1st of June I knew that I wasn't going to be walking the Camino that year. The place to be was to be with my mum. There was no way I was going to be away from home for that length of time although I needed my breaks as everyone does who is trying to help look after someone they love. I knew that if I had taken one single step on the Camino in the 2015 the question would be 'What are you doing here instead of being at home with your mum? Would have been there loud and clear. At least hopefully I had learnt that much from the journey so far!

My mum came back with me to the presbytery in



September and she had a good month, more or less. The support from the district nurses, the McMillan Nurse and the doctor were superb and I cannot thank them enough and the parishioners were incredible. In so many different ways they were there and without having their help our family would not have been able to look after our mum the way that we could. In September we watched films together, went for drives together and on my anniversary we went to Bolton Abbey but she waited patiently for several hours first I was at the hospital with a poorly baby. On her birthday we were able to celebrate the day with Her and Tom and Ben Jack and Deon (my nephews) . For a time there was a routine and many very special moments and conversations. One was about the Camino. My mum wanted me to take her ashes to the Compostela, in some way she wanted to be there when I arrived. We laughed about what weight she might be and if that was too much only to take a few. But I think we both knew that I would be taking them all when the time came. I even said to her when it became apparent that we were only days away from her dying that it would hopefully be in June 2016. She was adamant that I had a proper break after she died as I didn't have after my dad died and for all of us that can take its toll. But I also realise that not everyone is in a position to be able to do that.

The circle of love and support tightened around her over the last few weeks. Throughout she had been adamant that she wanted to know what was going on and what was said in conversations about her. So the Tuesday before she died I had to tell her that the Mc Millan nurse said that it would not be

long now. How different we are and how different we should be when we are walking with someone we love rather than in a professional role. Yes I try to look after people every week who are dying or with the families of those who have died but it is not the same at all when it is your own family and foolish to think that it is. I told my mum and she was a bit surprised as she said she was feeling better but it gave us the chance to talk about the funeral and the booklet that I had prepared and the prayer card.

On one side off the prayer card was the prayer of St Teresa of Avila 'Let Nothing disturb you...' Which I had printed out and it in a frame in the room where my mum stayed in my house so that she could see it. On the other side I put the picture of a hot air balloon and the words of a card she sent me when I set off to seminary 'Launch a dream, let it rise, let it take you to the skies, keep believing, travelling on heading for a bright new dawn!' She really liked this and all that we had chosen between us for the funeral.

My sister had been coming over regularly to help look after mum and the day my mum died my brother came again this time with my niece and newly born great nephew Oliver. In fact the last picture of my mum that I have, is of her holding Oliver. The last few nights I slept on a put me up bed in the room so that I knew that she would not be on her own and early on the Saturday morning it became apparent that she was dying. Carol, one the parishioners arrived, then one of the carers. I had been sat for a long time holding my mum's hand and then under instruction got something to eat and put on some smart clothes. I remember mum saying 'You look smart'



and I said 'That is for you' and then she said she saw someone in the corner of the room and 'not long now and I will be at peace.' I started to cry and she said 'You can stay but don't cry. Be brave!' Then not long after she died. We had had the chance to say we loved each other on a number of occasions and how I was sorry for the times I had caused her worry and pain. As soon as we knew that she had died I said to Carol ' Let's celebrate mass, before we do anything else, call anyone else let's celebrate mass.' And that is what we did. Then I had to make all the phone calls and preparations for the funeral.

Again with the help of many people especially Fr Andrew Stringfellow and Fr Bob Halshaw who stood either side of me all the way through the funeral I managed to lead the funeral. You will find the homily at the back of this section:

After the service at the crematorium I drove my nephews to the reception via the favourite spot that their grandma loved to visit over the last few months of her life. We ate a humbug each, as was the custom and I read them a story which she had written that I found in one of her notebooks. It was unfinished and I told them that we are meant to carry on and finish the story now.

Then as with dad there were and still are all the firsts to face including Christmas. And now I really had left home. I no longer had a place to go on a Sunday evening, when I celebrated mass for the family on a Monday morning. I was on my own and in the corner of my prayer room was the pen with Camino 2015 written on it and a book that reminded, resolutely



empty that year and my walking stick and my shell. But gradually the call to walk the Camino took root again, this time with a whole new depth and sense of purpose. I decided that I would leave on the 1st of June, why then. Well that was the day we had the bad news after the operation so I wanted to do something positive with that date in 2016. After Christmas I began to make more definite plans and the bishop very generously gave me a three month sabbatical to finish the Camino and have some time and space. This is how I have the chance to write these reflections now. Not that that was my plan which God had to intervene with and I am glad that he did.

So that was the Camino in 2015. I had heard it said by Anne Marie in relation to her walking with her husband who had been diagnosed with cancer and now it had become a reality for our family. Looking back I realise that so much that I had learnt on the Camino so far, helped me during the Camino 2015. But there was a journey to make now to Santiago and the date for leaving home in 2016 was set.

But there was the slight matter of a marathon to run the Sunday before I set off this year on the Camino. I know, what was I thinking! Well I was thinking that I needed something to train for during the winter and as I had run a half marathon last summer it would be a challenge. I do like running and go running most days but usually for 10k not 42k but something inside me said that it was a good thing to do. And it was, more or less, and I was in one piece at the end of it although I couldn't walk too far for the next couple of days but I believe that's fairly normal! As I had been training for the run I didn't have as much chance to



manage to fill it to roughly the weight it was going to be and practice a few times. To be honest it was heavy this year, heavier than previous years and heavier than most other people would be carrying but I wanted to make sure that I had all of my mum's ashes plus everything to paint an icon of St James as I went along and language books and my mass kit and maps for three months. Yes



three months. That was the plan, not actually the original plan but a plan to best use the time given me by the bishop bearing in mind I would hopefully arrive in Santiago early July. The most important part of the journey by far was to finish the pilgrimage to Santiago and my brother was going to join me to walk the last five days, the final hundred kilometres or so from Sarria together. Then I had worked out that I could walk back the other way along the Camino del Norte then through the Pyrenees to St Jean Pied de Port then back along the Camino France's for a few days then the other way and arrive in Lourdes for the end of August. Well if you want to make God laugh tell Him your plans and I think I was being a bit rigid with this plan especially as the idea was to be open to God's healing power. Note to self; best to leave God to decide how He is best going to do something for us when we ask Him to!

But I had a plan and I put my walking stick, notebook, pen and shell in my rucksack ready to travel to Madrid and then to Pamplona. My sister and two of my nephews (their brother was on band camp) came the day before and we went to Bolton Abbey and had fish and chips and watched a film. Then on Wednesday the 1st of June exactly a year after receiving the

Abbey and had fish and chips and watched a film. Then on Wednesday the 1st of June exactly a year after receiving the news about my mum and having to tell her that he was terminally ill I set off on the Camino. The journey began with mass in the parish and breakfast and then to the airport. I was assured that even though I had an overnight stay in Madrid my rucksack would be there at Pamplona airport when I arrived the following day. This made me a little bit anxious but I had to trust and more to the point my mum's ashes were with me as hand luggage along with her death certificate and letter from the crematorium. It's amazing what you can learn and do when you have to do it and I must say that people at the airports were very respectful as I got used to having my mum's ashes with me all of the time. Up until then they had lived in my prayer room since I brought them home with me just before Christmas but now they were to be a constant companion for the next five weeks at least. I had not decided by then to let them go at Santiago and give them to my brother.

So another leaving of home, a very different one this year reflected in the first entry in my diary with the pen my mum bought me but never saw me use. I say that, but actually I think in some way she is very aware, as is dad, of the journey I made this year:

The Front Page of My Diary The Camino 2016

Que el Senor sea contigo en tus idas y venidas

Que el Senor sea contigo en tu trabajo en tu ocio

Que el Senor sea contigo en las collinas y los valles de la vida

Que el Senor sea contigo en compania y en soledad

Que el Senor sea contigo en todo peregrinacion y su final

Y todos las bendiciones de Dos Padre, Hijo y Espiritu Santo permanezcan contigo para siempre Amen.

For mum and dad xxx

I found the blessing at Bolton Abbey and put it in Spanish in case I was asked to give a blessing on the way. It roughly translates as:

The Lord be with you in your goings and comings,

The Lord be with you in your work and your rest

The Lord be with you in the hills and the valleys of life

The Lord be with you in company and alone

The Lord be with you in all journeys and your end

And all the blessings of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain with you forever. Amen.

"Day One Pamplona to Peunta de la Reina Thursday 2nd of June

I did write something on my phone the night before as my



diary was somewhere in transit but that was lost when I was doing something on my phone somewhere on the Way!

5.15 start at the Hotel in Madrid to be at the airport for the short flight to Pamplona. It all went very smoothly despite my efforts to find things to worry about! The shuttle to the airport was there, as was my rucksack. Already spoken a lot of Spanish



including to the taxi driver. Went to Pamplona cathedral where they tried to charge me three euro entry. Went to chapel where I finished last time, said a prayer and set off via a shop. Starting to remember how to deal with practicalities (note to self this is day 39 all together on the Way). Met two American women, one a nurse, the other a fitness trainer. Their RC faith very important to them and they were good company. Then met Erica from Italy but preferred speaking Spanish on the Way and can also speak French. Walked with her before lunch then later after lunch. There was talk on that Way that Peunte de la Reine would be full, hundreds had set off from Pamplona. As it turned out there is plenty of room here in an Albergue that does bed,

dinner and breakfast Fr 25 euro. So had a shower, messed about with rucksack for a bit, had a sleep for an hour, have just celebrated mass and now writing the first entry in the book my nephews bought me last year which I chose with my mum with the pen she had engraved The Camino 2015.

I can't imagine just how special the journey is yet or what. Great gift it is from God, but it feels wonderful to be here, like coming to visit a very good and special friend where you can just pick up where you left off with all that's happened in between. Thought today - stop trying to find things to worry about! AMDG"

So again I'm on my way full of hopes and a few worries, full of all that has happened since I last walked the Camino and with a very full rucksack with a precious cargo in it. Now I understand a little bit more of what the medieval pilgrims meant when they saw the second stage of pilgrimage to be the leaving of home. For them it was a long and dangerous journey to Compostela and there was no guarantee that they would return so they would make a will before they set off. If they did return it could be after two or three years and yet for many different reasons, they were prepared to take that first step. It is good sometimes if we can go on pilgrimage to be able to do this physically although I realise that not everyone can. My sister would very much have liked to walk with us this year but she had her own family to look after who are younger than my brothers' family.

But whoever we are, I think we can enter into the spirit of



'leaving home' in our relationship with God as He calls us every day to something new in our lives. To answer the call is the first stage, the second stage then is to leave 'home' whatever that may be in our lives at that time. It may be that we are so surrounded with our own coping mechanisms in life that we stop relying on God. If so leave them behind in some way so that you are aware that the best thing to do is to rely on God. One powerful way is to use the hymn 'Alone with none but Thee my God' as a focal point in prayer focussing your trust on God. It may be that we are carrying too much in our lives and we need to be open to letting go of things, of giving them over to God. Easier to do when emptying a rucksack but still possible with our spiritual lives if we pray simply to trust, surrender, believe, receive. It may be that we need to see the world from other people's point of view more, to learn their language. I know that one pilgrim I met this year was hoping that walking the way would help him become less judgmental. Well then we can pray to the Holy Spirit to help us listen and be willing to learn how other people think and feel. It may be that we have had to physically leave a place, a job, a loved one, a security of whatever form and feel very alone or vulnerable. Well then it is good to ask God to help us make the first step on the journey with Him on the road ahead and we could use the psalm The Lord's my Shepherd to do that. It may be that we are keeping something to ourselves that we need to share with God in prayer, that is precious to us but needs the light of God's love upon it. Then perhaps light a candle and focus on that in prayer inviting the light of Christ into your life in a way that allows you to walk with him. There are many ways that we are called to



leave home each day of our lives and walk with God and if we have the desire to do that God will find the way. It may not be our way but it will be the Way.

Well dear reader we are nearly ready to make the journey together now. Poised at the start of the Camino in 2012 from Le Puy to Conques, then in 2013 from Conques to Lectoure, then in 2014 from Lectoure to Pamplona and in 2016 from Pamplona to Santiago itself. I say that we are ready to make the journey together because now you know some of the way I think and feel about the Camino and more importantly how I think and feel about God and some of what has happened in my life over the four years that I have been walking the Camino. You already know some of what happens on the Way. The next part is the journey itself. Each year had a particular destination, a holy place itself and a staging post on the way to Santiago. The arrivals are part four and bring their own mixture of adventure and emotion. But for now there is the slight matter of walking nearly 1600 kilometres and this is what I want to do with you next. Many of the photos I hope will help you feel that you are in some way walking with me and there will be extracts from the diaries themselves. Some days are more mundane than others and I am not going to spice things up for the sake of it! Rather I invite you to walk with me now bringing with you all that you have in your life at this time, all that is important to you at this time, so that reading the next part of the book wherever you are, you are in some way walking the Camino in your daily life.



Fr Chris' Homily for his Father's funeral.

There is something truly blessed when, at this moment in time, memories that are deep within us bubble to the surface of our hearts. Each one is a gift from God to help us as we gather together to remember my dad. Each one of you knew him in your own particular way and so you bring your own memories into God's presence today as your prayer for him. As I share some of my memories allow them to act as a catalyst for your own and together let us use them as a prayer.

All the recent events leading to today took place throughout Christmas and New Year and so some of the memories I have come from this time of year. On Christmas Eve my dad would take us for a walk up Cribden whilst my mum sorted everything in the house. It was a magical walk. I hadn't thought about this for years yet I realised the other day that every year I go for a similar walk as if by natural instinct. The memory is so deep it could seem to have been forgotten and yet the experience has formed me. Today we thank God for all that we remember and all that is within us through knowing my dad and recognise the influence that he has had on our lives as a gift from God.

Part of why we are gathered here today in God's presence is to look back in love and with a smile. I remember the year he went out to car when we were at Mr and Mrs Bank's house on Boxing Day. He was away for twenty minutes. Just as we were getting worried he came back in and explained that he had been sat next door for some time before he or anyone else noticed. Perhaps you can bring a fond memory to mind now of my Dad here in God's presence.

It may be to do with his lifelong love of football, particularly Manchester City. We listened to the last two matches with him in Nazareth house and it still mattered. He loved anything to do with World War Two and would often watch documentaries about that era. In fact if there had ever been a film on DVD where Manchester City had been integral in the success of the Second World War it would have been the perfect gift for Dad.



Bring to mind your own stories and images of my Dad and allow them to be a prayer for him here and now just as the time you have given today to come to the funeral is a prayer and the journey that you have made to be here.

And all these prayers make a difference. There is no doubt that the overwhelming support in prayer over the last few weeks for my dad and our family has given each person the strength and the peace that has been needed. The effect has been tangible and so the prayer today makes a tremendous difference. And in prayer we continue to love dad in God's presence and in prayer dad continues to love us. Death cannot take that away just as it cannot take away the experiences that we have shared that are a gift for life.

My dad had a very strong faith which was a very traditional faith. I didn't realise just how much of devotion he had to the Divine Mercy until I brought a picture for his room at Nazareth House. He wanted it on the wall in front of him. And we listened to the musical setting that was played before mass began today on a number of occasions. The picture of Divine Mercy would probably have been the last image that he saw before he gently passed away.

Sometimes it is written that someone died fortified by the rites of Holy Mother the Church. This was certainly true for my dad. During the two weeks he was in Nazareth House: he attended mass on a number of occasions, including Christmas Day and New Year's Day: he received the Sacrament of Reconciliation; I had the privilege of anointing him the day before he died; and he received Holy Communion a few hours before. He was at peace, the peace of Christ, a peace the world cannot give.

And I thank God for that because my dad was a worrier and spent much of his life worrying about death and yet over the last two weeks he had no pain, no fear and said 'I just want God's will to be done.'

A few months ago he told a story about his time in the RAF on National Service. Like all of us some stories he told a few times but this one was new and I only



heard it once. He told me that he was very settled in one camp so when he was told that he was moving to another camp he was very unhappy and dreaded it. Yet when he arrived at the new camp many of his friends from school and the area he had grown up in were there. It was a great relief and life was much better than before. It was on the tip of my tongue to say to him 'This is what we believe about life and death, this is our faith.'

The readings today, Christmas readings, remind us that a light has entered the world that the darkness cannot overcome. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, has broken the chains of sin and death through his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. Therefore death is not the end. One day we shall be gathered together as one in God's presence, as St Paul says 'Our true home is in heaven.'

And that changes the way that we look at life and death. It does not take grief away but it transforms it because it cannot last forever. From last Thursday onwards the words of Martin Luther King have rung out time and again in my mind 'Free at last!' And my dad is free at last from all worry, all pain and all suffering. And I thank God for that and the comfort that it gives me as I look back in love to remember my dad and forward in hope to remember the resurrection

'Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.'

**Free at last, Free at last, Thank
God almighty we are free at last.**

Martin Luther King Jr.



Fr Chris' Homily for his Mother's funeral.

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things pass. God does not change. Patience achieves everything. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.

This prayer of St Teresa of Avila was on the wall opposite my mum's bed over the last few months of her life. In many ways it sums up why we are here today: to remember in love Verda Gorton as we knew her and to proclaim the faith she has in the resurrection. And I use the present tense advisedly.

Whenever we look back in love we are immediately called to look forward in faith, whenever we use the past tense we are immediately aware of the future tense of our faith. Today we look at my mum's life and death in the light of the resurrection and this transforms our grief because we grieve in hope. St Paul said 'I want you to be quite certain brothers that you do not grieve as those who have no hope' and recently Pope Francis said that our hope has a face, the face of the risen Christ.

So in the light of the paschal candle that burns brightly as a reminder that Christ has conquered even death itself we remember Verda. I know that she would not want a 'This is Your Life' style summary of her life, rather for each of us to remember her as we knew her, at her best, on good form. Each of us will have many stories, some very personal, some that we can share with a smile, all we can offer to God as prayer for my mum today. Because I firmly believe that here in this place where for the last ten years my mum celebrated her faith at various times of great joy and sadness, sometimes on her own, sometimes with dad, sometimes with Therese and her family, sometimes with Dom and his family and sometimes all of us together as when Joshua was baptised and for my dad's funeral, in this place memories become prayers.



So as I share a couple of memories allow your stories and images of my mum to come to mind as you remember her.

My mum supported me in everything that I did and one way that she showed this was to drive me up and down the country to various colleges and universities, concerts, golf courses, and other places and drop me off and pick me up from train stations and airports. Always excited for me to go and happy to see me safely return enjoying stories of the adventures.

She had never flown until fairly recently but I had the privilege of taking her to Rome three times where she loved the Gesu church most of all, Ireland once to trace an ancestor who really was an Archbishop, and to the Holy Land. When she came as part of our parish pilgrimages she made a number of friends within the parish as she did at St Augustine's when I was there. And many of her friends are here also from Castleton, her time at All Saints School and more recently when she helped out with Caritas in Bury.

And my favourite story is of our time in the church of the nativity in Bethlehem. As we waited to venerate the place of the incarnation another group with a very pushy tour guide forced their way in ahead of us. I took exception to this but my mum said to leave it alone. Five minutes later however she had taken up the baton and was making her displeasure known to him as I said to her to leave it! She then stood as part of their group photograph making some sort of gesture and said 'that will be a surprise for them when they get home!' When talking about the homily for today she said 'don't make me out to be a saint' to which I said 'I wasn't planning too!'

But she was a woman of deep faith, she expressed in a different way to dad but it was equally strong and best expressed by the way she kept the star I bought her that day in Bethlehem after the international diplomatic incident we caused. I blest it at the site of the incarnation and she wore it up until her death



and asked me to make sure that it goes with her. And it was a reminder to her that Christ was and still is with her always. This is the faith that we profess: we are never on our own as we journey as pilgrims through this life on earth to our true homeland in heaven - the words of St Paul that are inscribed on my dad's gravestone: our true homeland is In heaven and Jesus Christ whose return we long for will come from heaven to save us.

And last summer I should have been continuing with the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain and all was arranged for mum to meet me there. But events overtook us and instead we had a very different Camino which had all the elements of pilgrimage including for mum leaving home. All I would say today is that she showed great courage and great faith that meant she could say that she was ready and not afraid and shortly before she died said 'hopefully it won't be long now and then peace.' And she talked time and again with great love and affection of family. She loved Dom, Therese and myself very much and equally. She loved her grandchildren deeply and had lots of special memories including Laura saying she could be ready from six in the morning to go out for the day, Niall offering to pay for some toys at the checkout with a ten pence piece, telling Kieran stories of Kevin the snowball, James saying that Gulliver's world was the best day out ever, Declan's picture was in her room over the last few months, and for the last ten years Ben, Jack and Deon were a precious part of her daily life. Two weeks ago she used all her energy to wrap the robot for Joshua and clothes and toy for baby Oliver and the night before she died she held baby Oliver Daniel in her arms.

And as many of you know every Monday I celebrated mass with mum and dad, more recently with mum and last week on my own for all the family living and dead. We had the family role call of Therese, Tom, Ben Jack and Deon, Dominic and Elaine, Laura, Ben, Joshua Samuel, Oliver, Daniel, Niall, Kieran, James and Declan, Aunty Mary and all living family. And we always remember the key dates for dad, Uncle Michael and Uncle tony, Grandma and Grandad Johnson,



grandma and grandad Gorton, aunty Margaret, aunty Mary, aunty Mary Trainor, Uncle Denis, uncle Des, and all the family who have died. And she firmly believed that once she died she would be with them all again in God's presence and that put quite simply is our faith.

Two weeks ago today she was aware that she was coming close to the end here on earth and we looked through the booklet for today. She said 'I know some might find that morbid but I find it helpful' and she only made a few corrections! The day before she died I had the privilege of celebrating the sacrament of anointing with her and viaticum, holy communion for the journey and on Saturday the 21st of November the prayers for the dying and the dead. And the first thing that I did once mum had died was to celebrate mass in the room with her with Carol who has been such a great help and who mum was deeply fond of.

And today it seems only right that I give her the final word! When I played the music for the crematorium to her I said 'and this last piece is from Faure's requiem ' In Paradisium' for the end. And she looked me straight in the eye and said 'there is no end!'

