



Thoughts on the Journey...

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A group of approximately 130 people set sail from Plymouth, England in 1620 on the Mayflower in search of religious freedom in the New World. These men, women, and children left on their long journey across the Atlantic in September under crowded and difficult conditions aboard the

Mayflower. Since the vessel was a cargo ship and not a passenger vessel, adjustments had to be made to accommodate the travelers.

Their voyage lasted about 66 days. They reached the shores of Cape Cod in November and arrived in complete wilderness on the heels of winter. There was no shelter and no provisions when they landed. The growing season was over, so there were no fresh fruits or vegetables. To sustain themselves, they rationed the food that was left from the voyage.

In order to stay out of the elements, the pilgrims lived on the Mayflower that was anchored in the harbor, but that was not without its problems. Due to the snow, sleet, and frigid winter winds, the Mayflower often took a beating during those initial months. With no nutritious food, they suffered from malnutrition, scurvy, and other diseases related to poor nutrition, bacteria, and viruses. History tells the story of the women who were vigilant in the care of their children. They often went without sustenance so that their children were fed. Of the eighteen women pilgrims, fourteen died. Twenty of the thirty-one children survived: eleven died. In all, of the 132 crew and passengers, only 53 survived the first winter.

This is only a thumbnail sketch of the courage, strength, and incredible hardship of a pilgrim people committed to an arduous journey - a journey rooted in faith. Even in the face of profound loss and pain, they still managed to gather together at a feast and give thanks to God. And so it goes for us today, as pilgrims on our journey of faith, seeking freedom.

In Luke's gospel this week, we are at the scene of Jesus' crucifixion. Two criminals are hanging on either side of Jesus. One of the criminals reviles our Lord, and says, if you really are who you say you are, then save us and yourself, too. However, the other criminal acknowledges the just nature of his own punishment and, at the same time, recognizes the unjust nature of Jesus' torturous death. He then says to Jesus,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

What do the early settlers of our country, the repentant criminal, and we, as people of faith today, have in common? We are all pilgrims on a journey seeking the everlasting freedom that can only come from the love and mercy of God. Each of us will take a different path and, along our way, we will encounter stormy seas; we will be diverted by our own sinfulness; we will suffer loss and heartache; we will hang on our own cross at times (sometimes justly by our own making: sometimes unjustly by the cruelty of others); we will pray and sometimes feel like our prayers are answered and other times feel like God has abandoned us.

It is Jesus, who understands the pilgrim journey because, through his Incarnation, he made the pilgrim journey himself. Our Lord ventured to walk the walk. He experienced the sufferings and the sometimes exhausting nature of our road back to our Father. Through it all, he gave thanks to his Father in heaven.

Jesus' gave us the perpetual example of thanksgiving in the feast of the Holy Eucharist that feeds us on our journey to everlasting freedom. He asks us to remember his sacrificial love in that meal we share together. And, like all people of faith who have gone before us, when we give thanks on our journey and turn to Jesus and say, "Remember me in your kingdom", he will turn to us and say, "You will be with me."