

## Our Homeland

In about the year 56 AD, Paul of Tarsus was in Ephesus, possibly in prison, having been caught up in a riot that had taken place in that city. During this period, he penned a letter to the Christian community in Philippi, a community that he himself had established. In his letter he tells this small fledgling community of the weight of responsibility he feels towards preaching the gospel. But, he also tells them that notwithstanding his own feelings of wanting to be gone, this proclaiming of the message of Christ, is something which he must go on doing, in spite of all of the setbacks and disappointments he has suffered, and which have caused him so much concern. In this somewhat sombre mood, he begins to think about the destiny towards which his life is taking him, and he instructs the Philippians that like him, they should look towards heaven for their homeland, because this, he writes, is the place from where our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ will come. This thought both bolsters and encourages him, and so on this the feast of the Ascension, when Jesus returns to the Godhead, perhaps we too should look towards heaven as the destiny or the homeland towards which we are also bound.

We know that when we think about the paths our lives take, we understandably concentrate on the things which impact on us with the smack of reality. It is true that the practical and the tangible loom largest of all, and the moments we set aside for the ethereal, more often than not, come at times of crisis and uncertainty. In other words we make a distinction between our physical and the spiritual selves, and sadly sometimes we allow the difference between the two to become a distance, which, by virtue of this disconnect becomes unbridgeable, leading ultimately to a crisis causing us to abandon any notion that the one is fundamental to the other. As Christians, our faith should tell us that allowing such a distinction is mistaken. We should see our faith as the key which unlocks the door blocking our understanding, thus allowing us to see and value the meaning of our physical selves, as existing hand in hand with our spiritual selves. St Augustine of Hippo taught that we all have an innate awareness of God, and that this is manifest within us through our searching and desire to know God in the restless longing we have for understanding. St Thomas Aquinas taught that each human person is impelled towards their highest good and this impulse is a source of growth, driving each towards that end, which is God. In both of these processes we feel a sense of movement in which our physical and spiritual selves combine to bring us to our homeland. The Ascension of Jesus is a celebration of the truth of where that homeland is. Jesus Christ is the human person through whom our physical and spiritual selves come to share in a participation of the divinity of the Godhead, thus bringing all humanity to its destiny.

We know that when we suffer disappointments and reversals we inevitably become a bit disillusioned and begin to wonder what it is all for and what is the point? The answer can only come through the practical application of our faith to these setbacks, which means that we have to manage them with the mind of Christ. In living with the mind of Christ, our ambition and desire is that through our witness, we are able to bring people closer to this homeland. We are called upon to pray that each of us will have the courage and strength to carry on working in his name in spite of our disappointments and reversals, journeying and moving towards the source and destiny of all goodness which is God.