



Jesus the Migrant

Fr John Cullen, at present working on an interfaith mission to the homeless in London, looks to the biblical reality of the migrant.

‘His own people did not accept him ...’ (Jn 1:11)

We need to change the perception that being a migrant, as well as being homeless, is something unusual and unnatural. The Gospels show us that Jesus is a displaced person in three senses: he is the heavenly one who came down to earth and was not accepted, he is a refugee on the run in Egypt, fleeing Herod’s threatened persecution of all male children under the age of two years; he spends his life as a mobile preacher and healer, with ‘nowhere to lay his head’ (Lk 9:58).

The entire Bible is a story of people in search of a home: Adam and Eve leave the garden, Noah and his family sail away from destruction, Abraham and Sarah follow God’s call, Joseph and his band of brothers head to Egypt, Moses wandered through desert, Judah is exiled in Babylon. None of these people were going on a package holiday!

They were homeless refugees, asylum seekers or possibly trafficked persons. Being displaced in exile and in the wilderness is part of the story of the Bible. There is no Old Testament without migration. In the New Testament there are many journeys evident in the Acts of the Apostles as well as in the Letters of St Paul. For us, to be a Christian is to be en route, on the

way, on a pilgrim journey to a citizenship that is not situated right here.

The story of Ruth is made up of many dialogues, and it epitomises the journey about migration and homelessness even for us today. Ruth is viewed with suspicion, just like many migrants today, with her foreign ways, religion, language and customs. Ruth knows all about isolation as a foreign widow who wanders into a place of famine. Ruth pledges her loyalty to Naomi and matches her lowly impoverishment when she meets Boaz, who shapes his life to redeem her and in doing so he finds a blessing.

Together, Ruth and Boaz portray for us the faithfulness of God. This is how God works with steadfast love, at personal cost, facing adversity, never letting us go, disarming us with goodness and constantly pointing us to a purpose beyond what we can yet see.

What Ruth’s story shows us is that a foreigner who appears to be nothing more than a bundle of trouble, turns out to be the harbinger of renewal and hope for an adrift nation with no vision or horizon for its future. Ruth evokes in Boaz an awareness of his own scarcity, as she inspires him to bring deliverance to his people at great cost to himself.

It turns out as we read the genealogy of Jesus at the early Christmas Eve



vigil liturgy, that it is Ruth's son, Obed, who is set to become the grandfather of David, Israel's greatest king. The Christmas gospel tells us that 'Joseph was of David's house and line' (Lk 2:4). Both Ruth and Boaz typify the figure of Jesus who goes into a far country to become one like us and bring about our salvation through a life of sacrifice and service.

Border controls and quota policies are part of the political agenda to sort out the issue of homeless migration. It is not the only framework for this conversation. Migrants and homeless people should not be seen as funda-

mentally a threat and a danger. They are first and foremost a challenge to our Church to recover its true identity, which is to love the stranger and care for the alien. This is embodied and crystallised in the words of Jesus, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Lk 10:27).

To turn our backs on migrants and homeless people is to forget our original identity, inhibit our synodal renewal and deny our true destiny. Christmas is a time for us to remember that Jesus was a homeless migrant. To forget that, is to forget who we are and also to forget who God is. ❤️