

Christian, go home

She was peeved. A friend had come across a quote from a “motivational speaker.” “There are too many people who would rather get home than get ahead,” he had said. They only want to get by. He had it backwards, she said. She got by in a hard time and then got ahead by going home.

It’s the kind of glib line a “motivational speaker” would use. But not innocent. It expresses an inhuman and unchristian idea of what matters in life. It’s a very worldly line.

Like so much in modern life, it draws people away from the personal to serve something big and abstract and distant. And also like so much in modern life, it runs against a cataract of human testimony – in this case, testimony to the primacy of home.

At the beginning of Western literature is the story of the disaster that follows when the Greeks foolishly leave home to fight the Trojans and the story of how Odysseus works for 10 long astonishing years to get home to his wife, Penelope. (And the way she maintains the home in her own astonishing way.) At the beginning of the story of the People of God, he leads the Hebrews out of the land of exile to their home. He liberates them, not to go wherever they want, but to go home.

The New Testament and the early Fathers saw heaven as the true and final home to which the Father will bring us. Jesus’ death and resurrection liberates us – again, not to go anywhere we want, but to go home. He returns to his Father to make a home for us.

The great Samuel Johnson famously said, “To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition, the end to which every enterprise and labor tends, and of which every desire prompts the prosecution.” (Usually seen made snappier as, “The end of all human endeavor is to be happy at home.”)

The Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc wrote a famous four-line poem about this: "From quiet home and first beginning, / Out to the undiscovered ends, / There's nothing worth the wear of winning, / But laughter and the love of friends." Home here may be the pub, but it's the same idea.

C.S. Lewis asks, "What do ships, railways, miners, cars, government etc exist for except that people may be fed, warmed, and safe in their own homes?" Tolkien ended "The Lord of the Rings," his story of the world's cataclysmic war, with the hero in his kitchen with his wife, at his table, with one of his children in his lap, saying, "Well, I'm back."

But this "motivational speaker," enemy of the humane life, pulls in the money by motivating sad saps to give up their homely lives for mythical promises of worldly success. He says with apparent disgust that "there are too many people who would rather get home than get ahead."

But why home? For many reasons, but for one very practical one. Jesus and pretty much everyone else warns us about being at home in the world. But not against being home at home. Home is a gift. It's a fallen version of man's original home in the Garden, and the life we were intended to live there.

As Christians, we live to get to our final home. We get to heaven by practicing in this life. Our earthly home is the best place to practice. You know the people, you see them, you can sense what they need and want. You must make concrete choices to love them or not.

Not that it will be easy. It may be good practice because it's hard. As Chesterton said in one of his more cynical moments, "The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people." Even when you love someone deeply, he will sometimes be very difficult and annoying and maybe infuriating.

That home will be your literal home (unless it's unbearable or

dangerous, and, alas, homes sometimes are), the place you live, the place you find your family and friends and neighbors. It might also be the soup kitchen or the prayer group or the beer with friends or the classroom. It might be the chat with neighbors in the street or the clerk at the grocery store. It's all the places where you have the choice to love someone or not to love them.

So go home, and live like Jesus.

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