

**The Journey** by Sister Patricia Cairns, CSJ

Good morning. I never thought I'd be this old!

Age has advantages. For one, people no longer think of you as lazy; they just think you're tired.

With prose and a little bit of poetry, I'd like to walk us through three stages of life: morning, noon, and evening.

We are here this morning to celebrate God's love, and to say thank you for the gift of a religious vocation and a truly purposeful life.

Our readings speak eloquently of God's unconditional love for us. To love unconditionally means to love anyway, no matter what! God's love flows from his infinite goodness, and throughout our lives, at every stage, he beckons us to walk with him so that we may share more completely in his life of love.

Deuteronomy tells us that God set his heart on us and chose us out of love. John in his First Letter describes the essence of God as Love. And in the Gospel, John records Jesus' outpouring of love for his Father and for us. The love we share is the Spirit of God which draws us to the Father through the Son. How comforting that Jesus implores his Father to keep us, whom he loves, as his Father's own.

God cannot love us more, for he is the fullness of love. He told us that he will never abandon us; never give up on us. His arms are always outstretched eager for embrace. He offers us his hand to guide us home. Francis Thompson captured this divine persistence in his poem, *The Hound of Heaven*.

All along our journey, Jesus invites us to walk with him. And he says:

Come walk with me.  
Take my hand.  
We're on journey  
To the Promised Land.

Since God cannot love us more, what is our responsibility in the relationship? Jesus wants us to accept the invitation to walk with him. And, as conditional as our love often is, we respond "yes," saying:

Come friend of mine.  
Come friend so true.  
I'll take your hand  
And walk with you.

Many are familiar with idea of a GPS system, which is short for a global positioning system. New cars are often equipped with one. You can buy a separate attachment and affix it

somewhere in your car. A GPS system is so designed that you plug in an address—your destination—and the system maps out the best route and usually the shortest to your termination point. The device talks to you along the way, saying things like: “In five miles take a left on Main Street,” or, “Bear right as the road forks.” I use a GPS system when I’m traveling from Louisiana to New York and back.

This high-tech gadget can be a bit annoying though, because when you deviate from the mapped route, it says to you rather sternly, “recalculating,” which means that you’ve strayed from the path and now it has to figure out a way to get you back on track.

Allstate Insurance Company is currently running a T.V. commercial that praises the work of the Company saying, “Uncertainty will not rule our lives when we put our lives in good hands.” I envision God’s hands as a divine GPS system. Our lives cannot be in better hands than God’s. God’s hands guide us all the way to our final destination.

Who mapped out our spiritual journey? Jesus, of course. He urges us to follow him for he is “The Way.” And he shows us that the journey is all about love. He tells us that he is not impressed with our successes unless these were accomplished with love; and he is not disappointed with our failures if we respond in love to his call to return to “The Way.” Our journey has everything to do with how we travel—with what drives us, what motivates us, what moves us. If it’s love, then we are, by the grace of God, on the right road.

Remember those early years in religious life? We were young and somewhat daring; full of enthusiasm and ready to set the world on fire for Christ. Jesus was with us then, inviting us to walk with him. He said:

Come Walk with me  
As sun rays rise,  
And morning’s blessings  
Fill the skies.

During our so-called “formative years” in religious life, we were encouraged to memorize maxims that could be used to steer us in right directions during particularly trying times.

Remember the maxim that suggested we do all the work and let someone else take the credit? I’m still working on that one. Then there was a favorite of mine, “Keep in mind the sublime end of your vocation.” Which means, “Don’t forget what it’s all about.” Our journey is not pointless.

God is the great recalculator. When we stray, wondering the side streets of life, God grasps us by the hand and gently draws us to himself who is “The Way.”

Then there were the middle years. Modern sociologists often place this stage of life between the ages of 45 to 65. And Jesus said:

Come walk with me  
Through the sun’s full shine;

Be companion,  
Friend of mine.

During the mid years, we held office, took charge, accomplished wonderful things, risked, got clobbered, were tempted, strayed and got back on the road by God's grace.

Speaking of being tempted reminds me of the story of the minister who was preaching on the evils of drink. He ended his sermon with these words, "If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." With even greater emphasis he said, "And if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." And then finally he said, "If I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." He sat down. The choir director rose and announced, "For our closing song, let us sing hymn # 365, 'Shall We Gather at the River.' "

During those middle years, we worked long hours, believing that we were part of a bigger picture; that we were Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, and that we were baptized and consecrated to bring the good news of God's love to the world.

Some of us may have become a bit disillusioned along the way, often because we lost focus and forgot that Jesus was walking with us. But we continued, and God remained faithful. It was during those mid-years that the meaning of the words, "Come follow me," took deeper root.

How does one follow Jesus? We do as he did—we care for the least among us.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my word and my Father will love you and we shall come to you and make our home in you."

What was Jesus word? Jesus said many things during his lifetime. Often he spoke of the poor and of our responsibility to care for those whom he called "the least."

He told us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned and the sick. He told us that if we have two coats and our neighbor has none, give that neighbor one of yours. He said should someone come to you thirsty; give that person a drink of water in his name. He said don't limit your walk with someone. If a person asks you to go a mile with him or her, go the second mile. And he said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

The route to our final destination is clearly mapped out.

We who are celebrating today are now in our twilight years. Some of us may still have many miles to go. Others are near the end of the journey. It is important, however, to realize that God's unconditional love is not constrained by time or distance. In this season of Lent, recall the good thief who, at the last moments of his life turned to the Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus replied, "This day you shall be with me in paradise." Where love abounds neither time nor distance matters.

So here we are celebrating 50, 60, 70, and 75 years of service, pleased as punch that we have not had to go it alone. We have asked Jesus to travel with us, and to still travel; to take us

by the hand and lead us home. Our faith tells us that the journey itself is not the end of the story, for a glorious new beginning awaits all us. And we say:

Come walk with me  
As night draws near;  
Hold my hand,  
Graced friend so dear.

And Jesus responds:

Come take my hand  
And walk with me;  
Let's walk together  
To eternity.