

August 7, 2016 The Flying Dutchman Homily:

Brothers and sisters, once upon a time Westerns were very popular with the American public. Who can forget some of the more memorable westerns on television, shows such as Bonanza, Gunsmoke and The Rifleman. Featured in many westerns was a mysterious figure known as the drifter. He was a man without roots who seldom spoke and lived alone. Wandering from town to town, he refuses to establish a permanent home for himself. He never settles in any one place. Very often the character is most appealing.

In the eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews the unnamed author pays tribute to the heroes of Israel's past. One in particular stands out: our Father in faith, the Patriarch Abraham. The author recalls Abraham leaving his home for a destination unknown. The Lord promises him an inheritance. "By faith, he obeyed." (Heb.11:8) Abraham never wavered in his trust and confidence in God. The author alludes to dwelling in tents, a symbol of this life, where we have no lasting city. (Heb.13:14) Abraham never realizes his goal but has God's Word as a guarantee that one day, a day in the distant future, the Lord's promise would be honored.

The late Msgr. Myles Bourke was one of the world's leading authorities on the Letter to the Hebrews. In his commentary on chapter eleven, he writes, "Abraham's journey is interpreted as an indication of his realization that his permanent place would be no where on earth, but in the heavenly city. In this, he is made to resemble the Christian believer". As Christians, we "desire a better homeland, a heavenly one." (Heb.11:16) We are like refugees in a strange land as long as we are on earth. Our final resting place is within reach of the baptized, but is in the hereafter, that is, in heaven.

I am reminded of the headlines in a New York tabloid, the day after Elvis Presley's death. It read, "From Graceland to the Promised Land." Graceland: His earthly abode; The Promised Land: his eternal resting place!

Let us also recall that the very one who can give rest to our souls does not himself have any resting place in this world. "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Mt.8:20) Until his return to his heavenly Father, the Lord is a vagrant on the earth!

As Christians do we see ourselves as "drifters", "strangers" and "aliens"? Has our life become a search for a heavenly homeland, a city whose architect and maker is God? (Heb.11:10).

Some of you may remember the legend of the "Flying Dutchman", a ghost ship. It is a ship that can never make port and is doomed to sail the oceans forever.

Our church is likened to a ship and we are its passengers. Our destination is our eternal resting place. And our ship's captain is Jesus Christ. He will lead us safely home.

Amen!