

Salmon do it. Hummingbirds do it. Butterflies do it. Turtles do it. All these creatures, and many more: they all go home again.

Salmon find their way from the vast ocean back to whatever tiny tributary in which they were hatched. Hummingbirds fly over 6000 miles to find their nesting sites. Butterflies congregate in the same trees, generation after generation. Migrating turtles closed down whole runways this past summer at JFK Airport as they made their way back to home ground. The instinct to "go home" is world-wide, widespread in creation and often times unstoppable.

There is, for each of us, a "homey place" where some part of our soul longs to return, year after year. That longing for going home begins around Thanksgiving and continues through Christmas. Why else do so many people enjoy Barbara Streisand's "I'll be home for Christmas?" By the way, that song is one of the most recorded Christmas songs, not to mention a favorite "Hallmark Specials" theme songs.

We all get a bit homesick at Christmas time even if we are home. We get homesick for our childhood homes. We get homesick for our own homes filled with our children. We get homesick for homes we never had. We get homesick for the homes we left behind.

Who first said "home is where the heart is?" Home is not just where the heart is. Home is our main hope of having a heart to begin with.

But is it really the "heart," our true and pure emotional yearnings, that drives our homing-instinct? If an emotional fix was all we needed, then a few Christmas specials should suffice. But what if home is where our soul soars and our spirit is fulfilled? What if home has as much to do with our Heavenly Father and the future that awaits us as it does with our earthly family and relationships? What if our "homesickness" is as much about our eternal home as our earthly home?

What if instead of finding our fulfillment in establishing a home, a family, a career, a reputation, a community standing, a professional expertise, what if what we need to be truly at home is something different? What if coming home is the indwelling and ingathering of the presence of God? What if coming home is to be gift-wrapped in the God of love?

In this week's gospel text Jesus assures his disciples that after the hard times come a holiday, that there will be a welcome home party. The triumphant return in "great power and glory" of the Son of Man ushers in a new era, ushers in the fullness of the kingdom of God.

As we wait for Christ's return, we are in fact waiting to go home and be with God. For a Christian, this longing to go home to be with God is as natural as it is with the salmon, humming birds, butterflies or even the turtles. There is something inside of us that keeps pulling or pushing us to go one direction over another.

The hope we have in our home coming is what will keep us going through the suffering. We are living in the time of suffering. We live in the time of the unknown because we do not know when Christ will come again or what is going to happen before he returns which is why we have been warned to keep awake.

It was almost midnight on Thanksgiving Day as I was writing this and I realized how tired I was and that I really wanted to go to sleep, I thought of how hard it can be for us to stay awake. There have been numerous times where I have fought sleep and so was not fully aware of what was going on around me.

How many times in our daily lives do we become so tired that we are not fully aware? Or what about when we have been waiting for so long that we begin to forget the warnings that we have received about staying awake and alert.

I think this is probably the most dangerous part for us as Christians. We can lose focus and turn from God because we are tired or think that Christ is not going to return in the near future. But the season of Advent is a time of waiting as we prepare for Christ to return and lead us home. Our home is with God and we are able to go home through Christ. We are encouraged to remain faithful and to be prepared for Christ to come once again.