

Column

A few years ago I travelled back to the church I attended as a child and young adult. Sadly, the church was closing, and one last service was being held to which all former members were invited. It was sad to see the church close, but it was great seeing people I had not seen for over a quarter of a century.

When I returned home, I telephoned my sister and told her about the experience. After listening, she said, “You know the church was like our home. We knew every nook and cranny of that building. Most everything we did revolved around the church.”

She was right. To this day, I could close my eyes and see, in addition to the church proper, every classroom, restroom, hall way, etc.

But the bit of the conversation that stuck with me was “the church was like our home.” That was so, and, more than that, it is the way it should be. We should feel at home in our Father’s house.

There you are taken as an infant and received into a larger family, the family of God. There you are spiritually formed, nourished and taught to live as a responsible member of this family. If you continue to live in the same community after reaching adulthood, it may well be the place where your marriage is solemnized and where you are brought at the end of life’s day.

The church on earth might be thought of as the home that prepares a person for a better home. Building-wise, it might be a grand gothic edifice, a restrained colonial-inspired house painted white, a Quonset hut or anyplace where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Supper of the Lord) are administered. Regardless of its size and style, it is a place of hallowed association, our home.

A church, of course, should not be turned into an idol. But, with that said, a building set apart for the worship of Almighty God points beyond itself to the Transcendent and to the faith of those who came before in a community.

Thus, with the psalmist, we may say, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth” (Psalm 26:8).

In summary, Christians are people of three homes: the home where we eat and sleep, the home where we worship God, and the home that awaits us above. Surely, a thought for reflection and celebration.

One final thought: Churches belong to everyone in a community, but they become our 'home' in truth only as we enter their gates with praise and thanksgiving Sunday by Sunday and as we use them as a springboard for service to those outside their walls.

O Almighty and Everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear our prayers, and grant to our home church all things that are needful for its preservation and flourishing: strengthen and confirm the faithful; visit and relieve the sick; bless and protect the children; turn and soften the wicked; arouse the careless; recover the fallen; restore the penitent; remove all hindrances to the advancement of thy truth; and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within thy holy Church to the honour of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Forward Movement)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.