

A Goodbye

Gospel reflection by Brian Wigger

French vocabulary is sometimes more precise than English. "Goodbye" is a case in point. The French use *Au revoir* for those everyday temporary separations, while *Adieu* is reserved strictly for final departures; it means roughly "*until we meet in heaven*." Life is a succession of *Aurevoirs* and *Adieus*. The number of the latter grows with the passing years. Our hearts and memories are peopled with faces that once were dear to us. Some, like our parents, died. Others moved away out of our lives never to reappear again. If their names crop up in conversation we say, "I wonder what became of so-and-so." They may say the same about us too. Life is a series of little deaths until our own death which for us will be the last great *Adieu*.

I once heard Father Terry Baum, SJ say in a homily, "*We are, as never before, a pilgrim people, on the move and we need faithful friends who travel with us*." In today's gospel, Jesus alerts his disciples to his imminent departure, his ascension into heaven. He doesn't say *Adieu* but *Aurevoir*. "I am going away, but I shall return." We never say goodbye to God, for God always goes with us.

Notice how immigrants who leave their families, friends, language and cultures and settle, often penniless and in a hostile environment, on the other side of the globe, begin by building houses of worship. Such was the case with the Irish in America or Australia. Such is the case today with immigrant Muslims building mosques all over Europe. God is what they cling on to.

God keeps his promise to be with us always. He will always keep his side of the bargain. It is up to us to keep ours. And when we come to the end of our pilgrimage here and have to make our last goodbye, it will be literally *Adieu*, "*going to God*."