

What is on your 'bucket list'? A 'bucket list' is a compilation of those things you wish to do before you 'kick the bucket'. Are you desperate to bungee jump before you take the leap into eternity? Do you have a deep longing to para-glide, abseil or wind-surf while the creaking limbs still have some flexibility? Is it your wish to visit Shanghai or San Francisco? To swim with dolphins or paddle with penguins?

I have never compiled such a dream-directory; and do not know what would be on the list. I would have liked to write a book but long ago accepted that, never having had an original thought in my life, and knowing there are too many works of second-hand derivatives filling the book shops, that will not happen. I have no wish to see myself suspended between heaven and earth in any form and I have been fortunate to travel widely and live for extended periods in fascinating places. There are still some places I would like to visit, Prague, Berlin; and one place I would dearly like to revisit: the place to whose Christians the second reading today appears to have been addressed, the ancient city of Ephesus.

In the 1980's I had a holiday in Istanbul with a priest friend whom I had known since we started together at the English College. Ken would die appallingly young. We had driven across France together, and, in an epic voyage, driven a lorry of medicines and food to Krakow in the days of *Solidarity*. And on this occasion, on a whim, decided to go to the New Rome, historic Constantinople now called Istanbul, the great city of Turkey. We saw the sites: *Hagia Sophia*, the Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace – where I viewed a reliquary which, it was claimed, held a hair of the Prophet's beard. It is not just Catholics who keep relics in veneration. We crossed into Asia for an evening meal, otherwise we ate in local places, that is, places where the locals eat, and we found them to be a delightful, friendly people.

On a further whim, we did a lot on the spur of the moment, we took a flight south, to Izmir, on the Adriatic coast. It is a holiday resort and so not a place where I would be enthusiastically inclined, but it is the place from which Ephesus is accessible.

We caught a local bus with local folk and local chickens. It was a blistering hot day, of course; a meandering journey took us to Ancient Ephesus, the home for three years of Paul, Apostle.

Ephesus was a great trade and commercial centre. It was home to a quarter of a million people. The centre of local governance and one of the great cities of the Roman Empire. Ideally positioned for sea and land trade-routes. It became wealthy and was duly grateful to the gods for its success. There were many temples and its Temple to Artemis (Diana in the Roman pantheon) was one of the Wonders of the Ancient world. The famous seven were chosen mainly for their enormous size. Not just Rhodes had an edifice that was colossal. The Temple to Artemis was said to be

the largest building in the ancient world, four times the size of Athens' Parthenon! Ephesus' theatre could seat twenty-four thousand.

In the modern age, ancient Ephesus has been restored to its former majesty. The work was in progress when we visited and it was stunning. Now it must be breathtaking. Hence its singular place in that list. One major difference between the modern site and its ancient incarnation is obvious. It was a great and busy port. Now it is far from the sea. Silting of the Cayster River, un-dredged for many centuries, has separated the town from a major source of its life.

A taxi-ride took us up into the hills and to a blissful vale of quiet charm. Here is Mary's House, the home of Mary and the Beloved Disciple, so local tradition claims, lived their final years. The truth of the story will never be known but such is the sublime peace of the vale you wish it to be true.

For the next few weeks we will be reading passages from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. It was the place where Paul was abused, imprisoned and founded a vibrant community. By the end of the first century the community was strong in numbers, though receiving a mixed report-card from John of Patmos, in his letter to Ephesus, the first of the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor which opens the Book of Revelation.

This letter to the Ephesians, I must warn you, was probably not written by Paul, and was not composed until a decade or so after Paul's death. (Six of the thirteen letters which carry Paul's name were probably not written by Paul, though all convey Paul's thinking. To attribute a work to a better known name was commonplace in the ancient world.) The majority of scholars agree that it is Pauline, in accord with the Apostle's thinking, but written by someone who was a devotee of Paul. The letter shows too developed an understanding of the Church; it is different in its vocabulary and sentence formation to be from the hand of Paul. It may even have been written by someone in Ephesus, as an instruction, even a sort of homily, rather than a letter.

This letter has some of the great passages of all the epistles and is for many people the best loved of the New Testament's letters. It gives us a well developed understanding of Christ as God; it emphasises the Church as the universal community of the faithful; and, as we heard today, there is an emphasis on the mystery of God's plan, once hidden but now revealed in Christ.

Now, knowing more about God's plan, revealed in Christ, and ensuring we are part of God's plans in his Kingdom should be on everyone's bucket list.