It was for Christmas 1949 when I was very young that I received a very special present. I want to share a little of it with you on what should have been a beautiful spring morning. This is a poem which some of you may recognise. It is called *Spring Morning*.

Where am I going? I don’t quite know,  
Down to the stream where the king-cups grow –  
Up on the hill where the pine-trees blow –  
anywhere, anywhere. I don’t know.....

A.A. Milne wrote some wonderful poems of childhood. This one reflects the gay abandon of young children and their ability to just let go and freely enjoy a true zest for life. It’s perhaps rather sad that we lose that sense of exuberance and of freedom, as we grow older.

However, these wild abandoned wanderings through the countryside on a spring morning rather contrast with the concentrated, direct approach to life that we find in this morning’s second reading where St Paul speaks to the Philippian Christians about the realities of life. Gone is the gay abandon. We now have specific direction to living. ‘Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.’ St Paul is absolutely clear about where he wants to go. He has an obsession [and obsession is not just the name of a perfume!]. He is looking for God and his purposes. In his relative old age - perhaps our middle age - he is not in the least nostalgic. He suggests forgetting what lies in the past. It is no use being bogged down with one’s own history, however important it may be. He is not very concerned about the present. If he were, he would probably only worry, because at this stage he is undoubtedly a prisoner at the centre of the Roman Empire. Rather, he adopts a more positive approach to life and living in his old age. He
wants to press on towards his goal in life, his calling by God to life in all its fullness. Even Jesus in our Gospel reading reminds the disciples that Mary has seized that life moment when she generously anoints his feet with costly ointment. The poor will always be there, but Jesus is only there fleetingly, and moments and opportunities for such generosity just vanish unless we can seize them at that special moment.

But let me come back to St Paul and that goal he has in mind. That goal is the goal of all humanity - God himself. St Augustine puts it very succinctly: ‘Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee’ - God himself. God is the Goal. Our difficulty in accepting this is often that we cannot lift our eyes above the immediate horizon and see the ultimate point and direction in which our lives should be heading. We so often divert ourselves from the Godward direction of fully human living. We seek satisfaction in passing fancies, which sometimes become an obsession in themselves. We seek fulfilment and happiness, which cannot be realistically achieved. Winning the lottery is not a realistic or a particularly happy option, as many people have discovered. Similarly, we must not be totally distracted by Brexit.

As Christians, following St Augustine’s experience, we are seeking rest in God. Now, it needs emphasising that this rest that God can give us has nothing to do with sleep. We are not heading for, and St Paul is not suggesting that we are aiming for a celestial dormitory where we do nothing forever and ever. Rather the rest in God that we may be aiming for is an active rest. It is not something which is still. It is the continuing relationship of dynamic loving between creator and creatures all together in total harmony of movement. I have often used the illustration of a glass of water, which appears to be at rest, yet in reality it has all its molecules dashing round the glass and atoms bumping up against each other. Although it is at rest, it is at the same time full of life.

This is a particularly appropriate time to remind you about our goal, which St Paul has in mind, and to look up to our horizons. Today is the beginning of Passiontide when in the Church’s year we turn and look towards the events of Holy Week - Jesus’ death and resurrection. We begin to follow in the way of the cross. Although St Paul is keen to keep the Philippians apprised of their ultimate goal, God himself, there is a reminder that, like Jesus, we have to tackle the realities and for Jesus and for us that is to be the way of the cross. The goal of finding our ultimate good in God’s life for us, the path of the mystic has always to be tinged with the reality of human suffering. We have to step back from mysticism and realise that we have to get our hands dirty. As Dean Inge of St Paul’s once
said; ‘the problem with mysticism is that it begins in mist and ends in schism with I in
the middle.’ Instead we have to take up the cross and follow Jesus, lovingly taking the
sting out of the suffering it represents. The way of the cross is the way of long-suffering,
self-giving love.

It is perhaps worth saying that the prime focus for so much of our personal suffering
today is self-concern and self-absorption. Hell might be described as stewing in one’s
own selfish juice. Jesus’ approach is the approach of the man for others. His suffering,
what he undergoes, is not for his self-fulfilment. It is for and on behalf of others. This is
the life and the direction into which we were all baptised and Passiontide is a good time
to remember that we tread in the way of the cross and have to grapple with the
contradictions of suffering.

However, let me come back to our poem which may provide a link between our need for
a final goal in God and our need to grapple with the realities of suffering. A.A. Milne
goes on about, ‘Where I am going? I don’t quite know.’ Yes, we need some of that
childlike abandonment to the will of God, but at the same time, like Jesus in the Garden
of Gethsemane we have to wrestle with the suffering in life and take up the cross as we
journey towards our final goal in God himself. May he give us the strength and insight to
understand and take up our cross now and follow him, just like St Paul. You may not be
a footballer, but in Passiontide you need passion for your final goal. To God, who
created us and has given us his life and restlessness, help us to follow the way of the cross
and come to know him and ourselves this Passiontide. Amen.