

PART TWO

JESUS' RETURN TO THE FATHER

JOHN 13:1 – 21:25

ACT I : THE LAST SUPPER
JOHN 13:1 – 17:21

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him.

And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,

Act I Scene 1. Jesus washes the feet of his disciples

We see Jesus reclining at table, having supper with his disciples. For the third time in quick succession (see 11:55; 12:1) we are reminded of the approaching Passover festival. For its significance see the commentary on 2:13. The other Gospels portray this meal as a Passover meal ('I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer', Luke 22:15). John locates it 'before the festival', but he also wishes to place the whole of the action of the second part of his Gospel in the context of this festival, for Jesus is about to *pass over* from this world to the Father, and, as the new Passover Lamb (1:29), his blood is about to be shed that we might *pass over* with him to share his life of intimate love-communion with his Father who 'has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son' (Colossians 1:13).

Already in 12:23 Jesus has told us that his 'hour has come'. In the first part of the Gospel John has been focusing on Jesus carrying out the mission on which he was sent by his Father. We kept returning to the themes of life and light. Now that the hour has come for him to be 'lifted up' (3:14, 8:28, 12:32), to return to his Father, we hear him speaking to 'his own', to those who have welcomed his love and who share his life. The central theme of the supper is love. John reminds us that the whole of Jesus' life has been motivated by love. We are about to see him love 'to the end'. Jesus loved to the end in that he went as far as one can possibly go in loving: 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (15:13). He loved till he could say in his final breath that his mission of love was accomplished (19:30).

John shocks us by the stark reminder that even here in this intimate meal with his own the devil, the enemy of love, is present in the heart of one of Jesus' chosen disciples (see 6:71). Talk of betrayal sets the scene and gives a sense of urgency to what follows.

What Jesus is about to do is introduced by a solemn statement that takes us back to the Prologue and to Jesus' coming from God and going to God.

Jesus interrupts the supper, lays down his robes, dresses as a domestic slave, washes his disciples' feet and then takes up his robes again. He will explain his action, at least in part, in the discourse which begins at verse twelve. There is another level of symbolism, however, that is not as obvious. As Jesus says: 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

Jesus is ritually acting out his approaching death and resurrection. Laying down his robes and taking them up again is an action that is meant to remind us of what he said earlier: 'the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father'(10:17-18; see also 1John 3:16). Others are about to take Jesus' life from him. He, however, is not their passive victim. He embraces his suffering and makes of it an offering of self-giving love.

He dresses as a slave for he is to die the death of a slave. He washes his disciples' feet, for he is among them as one who serves (compare Luke 12:37 and 22:27). There is a special intimacy in Jesus' action. He wants them to understand his laying down of his life as an act of love. This is why Jesus insists with Peter that he must do what he is doing, for it is only through his laying down his life in love, it is only through his loving to the end, that he can return to the Father and that Peter can share Jesus' life with him. This inheritance will be described later by Jesus in his prayer to the Father as 'the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed'(17:5). In the Prologue it was described as being 'close to the Father's heart'(1:18). It is this intimacy which Jesus came to share with us. If we are to share this glory with Jesus, we must accept the scandal of the cross.

Peter does not want to miss out on sharing the life of the one he loves, but he understands Jesus' action in terms of ritual purification. Jesus makes it clear that this is not what is happening. It is purification but through Jesus' gift of love. As Jesus will say later: 'You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you'(15:3) and as the author of the First Letter of John says: 'the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin'(1John 1:7).

⁴[Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.'

⁹Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash [except for the feet] but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?

¹³You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am.

¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

¹⁸I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me."

¹⁹I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he.

²⁰Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.'

This leads to the second level of symbolism. Jesus is the servant of the Lord, doing God's will by caring in love for the needs of his brothers and sisters. We are called to do what he is doing: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends' (15:12-13).

We are used to a kind of service in which a person in an inferior social position has no choice but to be at the service of a so-called 'superior'. Sometimes service is a sign of the power which one person has to meet the needs of others. The one serving maintains a position of superiority. Jesus is showing us that true service is when we make a gift of ourselves to another. The service is not exacted. It does not create a debt which must be paid back. It evokes a response of love and does not degenerate into covert exploitation.

John has already spoken of the Eucharist (6:51-58). Here it is through the washing of feet that he wishes to bring out the significance for Jesus of his coming death and resurrection. Jesus' invitation to his disciples to do what he is doing expresses through a different symbol the same invitation that we find after the Eucharist in Luke: 'This is my body, which is given for you. *Do this* in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19). We find it also in Paul: 'This is my body that is for you. *Do this* in remembrance of me ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. *Do this*, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). We are being invited to give ourselves to others, even to the pouring out of our lives. We are being invited, in Paul's words, to 'let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5).

John includes here two statements found also in other Gospels (John 13:16, see Matthew 10:24, Luke 6:40; John 13:20, see Matthew 10:40, Luke 9:48, Mark 9:37). John adds a statement about 'messengers' (Greek: *apostolos*, 13:16 - used only here in John). Jesus has been sent by the Father. Now he is sending us. We are to do what Jesus is doing, and experience that special happiness that comes only with the blessing of God (13:17; compare: 'Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives' (Matthew 24:46).

That Jesus' disciples copied even Jesus' action as a symbol of their commitment to continuing his service is clear from the kinds of qualities expected of a widow if she was to be received into the company of consecrated women: 'she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way' (1 Timothy 5:10). In laying down his garments and in 'taking the form of a slave' Jesus is symbolising his death and resurrection and his loving service of others. Both levels of symbolism are picked up in an early Christian hymn quoted by Paul (Philippians 2:6-11):

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form, he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.
 Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Once again we are reminded of Judas, included here among those whom Jesus has chosen (13:18). To make sure that we do not imagine that in choosing Judas Jesus was mistaken, John has Jesus explaining Judas's betrayal of him as fulfilling the Scripture. He quotes from the psalms: 'Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me' (Psalm 41:9; see also Mark 14:18). The following verse of the psalm is also relevant. It is a prayer to God to 'raise me up' (Psalm 49:10). In regard to the relationship between Scripture and Jesus' actions, we refer the reader to the commentary on 12:38.

This whole scene is a prophetic action intended primarily to symbolise Jesus' death and resurrection. John will recount the events of Jesus' passion, but here he is sharing with us what he came to see as the meaning which these events had for Jesus, a meaning expressed at the Last Supper in this washing of his disciples' feet. As we follow the horrific details of Jesus' passion and death, John wants us to keep looking into the heart of Jesus at the intimate love which he has for all. Then, when we see Jesus 'lifted up' and when we 'look upon the one whom they have pierced' (19:37), we will see God revealed. We will believe that Jesus is who he claims to be, the one sent by the Father to share with us the communion which they enjoy (13:19; compare 8:28). If we accept this we will do what Jesus is doing. This is what it means to believe, and, believing, we will 'have life in his name' (20:31).

Jesus' final words are addressed to us. They pick up the theme of being sent as apostles to carry on Jesus' mission. Just as Jesus is encouraging his disciples to receive him, so he is encouraging us to receive his apostles, promising us that if we receive his apostles we are receiving him, and if we receive him we are receiving the one who sent him.

²¹After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.'

²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

²³One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him;

²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

²⁵So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'

²⁶Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.'

So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot.

²⁷After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him.

Act I Scene 2. Jesus, Judas and the Beloved Disciple

Jesus was 'greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved' when confronted with the death of Lazarus and the grief that surrounded him (11:33). He was 'troubled' when the hour came in which he was to confront his own death (12:27). Here he is once again 'troubled in spirit' as he announces his betrayal by one of his chosen disciples (compare 13:2).

For the first time we are introduced to 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. He is mentioned in connection with Peter and in sharp contrast to Judas, and he will remain with us now throughout the passion as a symbol of the faithful disciple over against those who fail Jesus in his hour of suffering. As noted in the Introduction, it is this disciple who is the key source of this Gospel. He is 'reclining next to Jesus' (literally 'in Jesus' bosom').

This intimacy recalls that enjoyed by the Word, 'God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart' (1:18; literally 'into the Father's bosom'). This Beloved Disciple symbolises what each one of us is called to be, for we are all invited to share the intimacy which Jesus has with his Father; we are all called to be Beloved Disciples.

Peter motions to the Beloved Disciple to ask Jesus who the betrayer is (compare Mark 14:19; Matthew 26:22; Luke 22:23). Jesus knows what is in the human heart (see 2:23-25) and he responds to the inquiry by identifying his betrayer as the one to whom he is showing special favour by personally offering him some food from the dish (see also Mark 14:20; Matthew 26:23). In accepting Jesus' offering without altering his intention, Judas demonstrates that he is resolved to do Satan's work (compare Luke 22:3: 'Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve').

It is significant that Judas acts only when instructed to do so by Jesus (compare Matthew 26:50). John is presenting this whole section as coming from the free initiative of Jesus himself: 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father' (John 10:17-18).

Judas leaves Jesus and 'it was night'. It is indeed 'night'. 'This is your hour, and the power of darkness' (Luke 22:53). We are about to see all the powers of darkness unleashed against Jesus. However, we have already been told that they will not succeed in overcoming the light (1:4). The 'devil' (13:2) - called 'Satan' (the adversary) here for the only time in John - 'will be driven out' (12:31).

John highlights Jesus' desire for the conflict to be under way: Jesus tells Judas to 'do quickly what you are going to do'. When Judas (= Satan) leaves, Jesus is at last alone with 'his own'. The victory of light over darkness is assured and Jesus' first words are of glory. What Jesus came to do is happening 'now' (13:31), and it is about revealing who God is and the intimacy of the communion which Jesus has with his Father.

Jesus is present in his Eucharistic community and addressing 'his own'. For the last time in John's Gospel, he identifies himself as the 'Son of Man'. Just as God exalted the Suffering Servant ('See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high', Isaiah 52:13), so 'now the Son of Man has been glorified'. Victory is assured. The hour of his being 'lifted up' (8:28) has come. We are to see it as his hour of glory. He came to reveal God and, in his identifying with the poor and the broken who cry to God in their distress, in his loving to the end, he is about to achieve the goal of his mission. He is about to give the final revelation of God as a God of love. 'It is accomplished' (19:30). God has been glorified in him and God has revealed the glory of Jesus - the love which binds him to the Father and which draws everyone to him.

^{27b}Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.'

²⁸Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor.

³⁰So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.

³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Act I Scene 3. Jesus' Farewell Speech

John is modelling himself on Deuteronomy which is composed as a farewell speech in which Moses tells the people of Israel that he must soon leave them and encourages them to persevere in their faith. Moses reminds them of what he has said to them and of what God has done for them and instructs them to keep God's commandments and remain faithful to God's covenant. He concludes by offering a prayer to God for them. The author of Deuteronomy modelled himself on speeches from the patriarchs found in Genesis, and Deuteronomy itself became a model for a number of Jewish works composed in the century before and in the century after the time of Jesus.

Jesus is preparing to leave the world and return to his Father. He is having his final meal with 'his own'. With the darkness outside and free from the need to engage in controversy with his opponents, he can share his deepest thoughts freely with those who share his love and who are going to carry on his mission after his death.

We will find that the speech moves in and out of various time-frames. As we listen, there are times when we hear Jesus speaking at the supper. At other times we hear him addressing us from the cross or from the communion with his Father that he enjoys in his post-resurrectional glory. As John writes he is very conscious of the risen and glorified Jesus present in his own community and constantly reminding them of his love.

In Part One, John selected certain signs and then wove together sayings of Jesus that helped to bring out their significance. Here in Part Two the process is reversed: the reflection comes before the action. In this farewell speech Jesus is sharing insights into his own understanding of his approaching passion, death and resurrection. We are being invited into the mind and heart of Jesus as revealed to the Beloved Disciple. The actual shape of the material may come from homilies given by the Beloved Disciple.

Jesus is about to 'depart from this world and go to the Father' (13:1). Soon we will look upon him 'lifted up'. We will see how close he is to the heart of God (1:18). In that intimate communion of love we will see who Jesus really is and Jesus is asking us to believe that he will be enjoying in the presence of his Father the glory that he had before the world existed (17:5): 'God will glorify him'.

An examination of chapters thirteen to seventeen reveals evidence of editorial composition. Jesus' final words in chapter fourteen, 'Rise, let us be on our way'(14:31), would seem to lead directly to the account of the arrest in the garden (18:1). Chapters fifteen to seventeen seem to have been included by another writer from the same community who is drawing on the same tradition and who is careful to leave the text as he found it. If the same writer was responsible for the whole of chapters thirteen to seventeen he would surely have felt free to arrange it differently.

Earlier in the Gospel Jesus has told Nicodemus that he had to be 'born from above' (3:3). We know from the other Gospels the importance of Jesus' teaching that God wishes to relate to us as a loving Father and that each of us is to be, like Jesus himself, a child of God: 'unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3; see Matthew 19:4,14). Jesus addresses his disciples as his Father's 'little children' (compare 1John 2:1).

Earlier he had said to the Jewish authorities who rejected him that they could not come to the place where he was going (7:33; 8:21). He was referring to the inability of unaided human nature to have access to the sphere of the divine. He was referring also to the effect on us of the long-standing and persistent rejection of the light that has been part of our human history (see 1:10-11). In their case he was also commenting on their personal refusal to welcome his revelation. His disciples lived within the limitations of the human condition, but they were the ones who welcomed him and his words. They cannot come for they are to remain in the world. Soon he will comfort them by telling them that though they cannot yet come to him, he will come to them.

³³**Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come."**

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

In describing Jesus' last supper (13:2), John does not focus, like the other Gospel writers, on the symbolism of the meal and so on the Eucharist. He has already reflected on this in chapter six. He does, however, go to the heart of what the shared meal means. We are sharing a meal with *him*. He is giving us his love and it is this love, if we truly receive it, that will generate in us the special love for each other which will identify us as his disciples (compare 1John 3:14).

He is giving to us the love which his Father gives to him (see 15:9). It is this love which we are to give each other. He has given us an example. We are to serve each other with the same delicate intimacy which he has displayed in washing our feet. He is, however, going much deeper here than simply presenting himself as a model. He is inviting us to share in the communion of love which he experiences 'close to the Father's heart' (1:18).

Using covenant language in this his last will and testament, Jesus speaks of a 'commandment'. We might recall the promise made through the prophet Ezekiel:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

– Ezekiel 36:26-27

It is true that Jesus' disciples are to have the same universal dimension to their love that Jesus had. He was sent not for a chosen few but as 'saviour of *the world*' (4:42). This is true, but it is not the focus of this farewell speech. Jesus is encouraging his disciples to care for each other in the community of love to which they belong as his disciples.

When God revealed himself to Moses it was as a liberator who hears the cry of the poor and who is determined to redeem them (Exodus 3:7). His word was a challenge to Moses to offer himself as God's instrument in delivering the Hebrew people from slavery. God's word has ever been thus, as we see in the lives of those in every culture who have heeded revelation. The commandment given by Jesus is, in this sense, an 'old commandment'. As John says in his First Letter: 'Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning' (1John 2:7; see 1John 3:11,23).

Yet, as Jesus says, and as John repeats in words which come immediately after the quotation just given, in another sense the commandment is new: 'I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining'(1John 2:8). It is 'new' because now, at last, someone, namely Jesus, is actually living it to the full. 'God is love'(1John 4:8). Creation itself is an expression of God's self-giving, a 'word' of love. In Jesus we are watching the Word of life 'without whom not one thing came into being'(1:3). 'We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life'(1John 1:1).

Jesus has obeyed the command to love with a complete response which can now harness for his Father all the energies of love. The commandment which he gives his disciples is new because we can now see it happening. If it was only good example which we were receiving, we might admire it and do nothing, or we might despair of ever being able to do what we see Jesus doing. Jesus is offering us more than example. As we shall hear shortly, he is offering us his own Spirit, the very love which he enjoys with the Father. With this Spirit we will be able to obey the new commandment which he is giving us. It is a commandment not because love can be imposed, but because a recognition of the love which God displays in the new covenant that he is making with us in Jesus generates within us an imperative urging us to make the only appropriate response. Only by obeying this command of Jesus can we live the divine intimacy which he came to share with us.

We are reminded of Jesus' earlier words to Peter: 'unless I wash you, you cannot share the inheritance with me'(13:8). To refuse the love which he is placing upon us as his final commandment is to refuse the life he is offering. John makes this point over and over again in his Letter: 'Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist'(1John 2:4). 'Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him' (1John 3:18-19). 'Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love' (1John 4:8). 'Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also'(1John 4:20-21).

³⁶Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?'

Jesus answered, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.'

³⁷Peter said to him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.'

³⁸Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.'

Peter addresses Jesus as 'Lord'. John is already thinking of the glorified Jesus. Jesus does not directly answer his question. It ought to be obvious that he is going to the Father. The question does, however, enable Jesus to repeat his earlier statement about the inability of unaided human nature to have access to the sphere of the divine (see 13:33). He assures 'his own', however, that afterwards they will follow him.

Peter has yet to learn the basic lesson of discipleship. His love for Jesus is sincere, and he cannot imagine that it will fail him. He still does not realise his complete dependence on grace and he makes the extraordinary statement that he will lay down his life for Jesus. His empty claim is heavy with irony, for these are the very words which Jesus used when speaking of himself as the shepherd (10:11,15).

Peter will become a good shepherd (21:15-19) but only when he has learned humility. He must learn that the love which Jesus is asking of him and of all his disciples is not a love that they can claim as their own, even the love that is stirred in them when they are attracted to him. It is his Father's love which he shares and which he is offering them as a gift. They never have control over this love. They must always receive it as a gift with empty hands and an open heart, and live it in complete dependence upon him.

The Beloved Disciple remembered how troubled their hearts were that night. He remembered, too, the strength they experienced from Jesus. Facing death is not just facing separation from the life we have known and from those to whom we are bound in love. It is part of the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, life and death. Jesus' own heart was troubled when the hour finally came to confront all that death symbolises (11:33; 13:21). So he knew something of what his disciples were experiencing.

When Jesus emptied the temple and said that no fruit would come from the fig tree, Peter felt the ground of his faith being swept from under him. Jesus' response then was: 'Have faith in God' (Mark 11:22). Similarly here. With the departure of Jesus, how would the disciples manage? They must continue to believe in God and in Jesus. (For an examination of what John means by believing, see commentary on 2:11). Jesus' words echo the refrain of Psalm 42-43:

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you
disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise
him, my help and my God.

– Psalm 42:5,11 and Psalm 43:5

Jesus has just told them that they cannot follow him now, 'but you will follow afterward' (13:37). To follow him they must continue to believe in God and in him. God's love does not force entry into our hearts and minds and lives. God calls us, challenges us, invites us to respond to his love as a free person. Jesus shows us how to respond and so the way to follow him, but the choice is ours. If we choose to respond, he assures us: 'I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also'. Jesus came that we might live to the full (10:10), and we have already learned that the life which he offers consists in communion with him in the life which he shares 'close to the Father's heart' (1:18). We live when we abide in him and he abides in us, sharing with us the life which he has from his Father (6:56-57). The key to our joy is communion with him, being, as he says, 'where I am'.

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

All are called to share Jesus' life

We need have no fear that this offer is meant for others but not for us: '*Whoever* believes in him may have eternal life'(3:15). '*Anyone* who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life'(5:24). '*Anyone* who comes to me I will never drive away'(6:37). '*Whoever* keeps my word will never see death'(8:51). '*Whoever* enters by me will be saved'(10:9). Jesus promised: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw *all people* to myself'(12:32).

The hour for Jesus to keep this promise is upon him. He is going to the Father. He assures 'his own' that there are many dwelling places in his Father's house. He is speaking of heaven, but not only as the communion with the Father to which he is returning and for which he is preparing a place for them (compare Deuteronomy 1:33). He is speaking of the love-communion which those who believe in him can experience *now*, in the midst of the journey and the struggle. He is doing what he is doing so that we will have a place where we can remain 'in the bosom of the Father'(1:18), enjoying the same intimacy as Jesus himself experiences. Jesus' death does not mean that he will be separated from us: 'I will come again and take you to myself'. He will take us to himself when he comes again in glory (see 1Thessalonians 4:16-17). He will take us to himself when our turn comes to die (2Corinthians 5:1). He will take us to himself now by sending his Spirit to dwell in us and to draw us into his intimate communion with the Father which he longs to share with us.

The goal of our lives is communion in love with God. Thomas's failure to understand Jesus provides the opportunity for Jesus to take us to a deeper level of understanding: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'. The way to the communion of love for which we are created is through Jesus. He lives this communion. He reveals the life-giving truth of God's love and, through the gift of his own life, he enables us to share his communion with him.

In reference to the law, we read in Deuteronomy (5:33): 'You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live'. John and his community came to see that 'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'(1:17). Jesus not only shows us the way. He *is* the way (compare 10:9), for it is our communion in love with him that opens us to the Father's love and draws us into God's embrace. We recall the prayer of the psalmist: 'Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth'(Psalm 86:11). 'You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy'(Psalm 16:11). 'O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling' (Psalm 43:3).

In the Prologue, John spoke of Jesus as being 'full of grace and truth'(1:14). He *is* the truth, the truth that will set us free (8:32), the truth of God's faithfulness to love. In Paul's words, he is the Yes to all God's promises (2Corinthians 1:20). Jesus reveals God's faithful love to us by being himself the expression of it. For a reflection on what Jesus means when he says he *is* the life, we refer to our commentary on Jesus' conversation with Martha (11:17-27). Jesus *is* the way because he is the only avenue to salvation: 'No one can come to the Father except through me'.

One hears this text being used in an attempt to prove that only those who are explicitly and consciously Christian can be saved. Such an interpretation is contrary to John's understanding, and indeed to the whole of the teaching of the New Testament. To say that no one comes to the Father except through Jesus is to say that everyone who comes to the Father comes, in fact, through Jesus.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.'

⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'

⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me.

The only way

Let us ask, then, whom does God intend to come to him through Christ? The answer to this question is clearly 'Everyone'. Paul writes: 'God our saviour desires *everyone* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4). He also writes: 'The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of *all*' (Titus 2:11). 'As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's righteous living leads to acquittal and life for *all*' (Romans 5:18). 'God has assigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon *all*' (Romans 11:32).

This conviction is at the heart of Paul's belief that the gospel is to be preached to 'every creature under heaven' (Colossians 1:23). This is exactly what one would expect 'since there is only one God' (Romans 3:29), and 'from him and through him and to him are all things' (Romans 11:36). Paul is simply echoing the words of Jesus when he said: 'When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself' (John 12:32). The essence of the Gospel is that God is indeed the Father of every person conceived into this world, and that God's love for each is unconditional and complete. It is obvious from everything Jesus did and said that God intends to draw everyone into communion with him.

This leads to a second question: How does God intend to draw everyone to him? Paul writes: 'God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he set forth in Christ as his providential design for the fullness of time, to put all things under Christ as head ... God has made him head over all things for the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things completely, everywhere' (Ephesians 1:9-10, 22-23). God is drawing everyone to live in communion with his Son by being part of his 'body' the Church, the community which lives by his Spirit and which, from the beginning, was called 'catholic' because it was open to all. As Ignatius of Antioch wrote in the first years of the second century: 'Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church' (Epistle to Smyrna 8.2).

Belonging to the body of Christ means living by his Spirit. It is not simply a matter of words, or externals. It is a matter of faith, hope and love. As Jesus said: 'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father' (Matthew 7:21). Faith, in the whole biblical tradition, is a matter of listening to God's word, taking it seriously, and acting accordingly. The only kind of faith which Paul sought to inspire in people was 'faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6). We are to 'do the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15).

We can conclude that if we wish to be saved, each of us, from where we now stand, must draw closer to full communion with the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (Creed of Nicene-Constantinople, 381 AD), and be committed to a life of deeper faith, more trusting hope, and more perfect love. It follows that a person cannot be saved who positively and explicitly rejects belief in Christ as the revelation of God, and refuses to allow the life of Christ to live in him or her: 'Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever rejects belief will be condemned' (Mark 16:16). This is not because the exalted Christ is not drawing everyone to himself and so to the Father, but because such a person refuses to receive the offer so lovingly made.

What, then, of those who have never heard of Christ? What of people who think they are rejecting Christ, but are rejecting only the false Christ which has been presented to them? If God really intends everyone to be saved, is he limited by geography or by our sinful failure to preach the Gospel in an authentic way? Must those who through no fault of their own have never had an opportunity to come to know and love him miss out on the opportunity to respond to the Spirit of the risen Christ and be drawn to the Father?

Does not Paul say that he ‘fills all things, completely, everywhere’(Ephesians 1:23). Christ is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:13). This Word spoke in the prophets for centuries before the Incarnation (Hebrews 1:1). This same self-communication of God has been operative ‘since the beginning’(1John 1:1), ‘enlightening everyone’(John 1:9). The risen Christ is now drawing everyone to himself, drawing them in mysterious ways to ‘everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire’(Philippians 4:8). ‘For those who aimed for glory and honour and immortality by persevering in doing good, there will be eternal life ... glory and honour and peace will come to everyone who does good’(Romans 2:7,10). Condemnation is only for those who sin ‘without excuse’(Romans 1:20).

This does not lessen the importance of preaching the Gospel to everyone by word and example, and of welcoming everyone into the church which is the ‘fullness of Christ’. God willed to reveal his heart in the heart of Christ. He willed to reveal his face in the face of Christ. He willed to reveal his word in the words of Christ. We who have had the privilege of seeing his face and hearing his words and experiencing the intimacy of his heart will surely want to respond to his mission to draw all to Jesus so that they will know who it is who is drawing them to the Father. Let us listen to Pope Paul VI:

It would be useful if every Christian and every evangeliser were to pray about the following thought: people can gain salvation also in other ways, by God’s mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame - what Saint Paul called ‘blushing for the Gospel’(Romans 1:16) - or as a result of false ideas we fail to preach it? For that would be to betray the call of God, who wishes the seed to bear fruit through the voice of the ministers of the Gospel; and it will depend on us whether this grows into trees and produces its full fruit.

Let us therefore preserve our fervour of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelising, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us - as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelisers all through the Church’s history - an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench.

May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelisers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.

To believe in Jesus

The risen Christ is already drawing every person to himself and so to his Father. People will be saved if they respond to his Spirit, even if they do not come to an explicit awareness of who it is who is drawing them. The task of the Christian Church is to be the instrument of Christ for drawing everyone to the fullness of his life. Christians are to grow to be able to say: 'It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). We are to be the heart of Christ in the world, the face of Christ in the world. We are to mediate his grace and draw everyone to the fullness of life in him and the assurance of salvation that comes with living his life. The Church is to be a 'seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race' (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.3).

Jesus said: 'No one can come to the Father except through me' (14:6). To the extent that circumstances make hearing the Gospel impossible, or that people fail to come to know Christ because of the failure of Christians to live his life in an authentic way, the risen and exalted Christ 'lifted up from the earth' has his own mysterious ways of 'drawing all people to himself' and so to the Father.

The Second Vatican Council in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World has this to say:

The Christian partakes in the paschal mystery, becomes like Christ in his death and will encounter the resurrection fortified with hope. Nor does this hold only for those who believe in Christ: it holds for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an invisible fashion. Christ died for everybody, everybody's ultimate vocation is the same, divine vocation; then we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers everybody the possibility of sharing in some way known to God in this paschal mystery.

– *Gaudium et Spes*, n.22

Jesus' words remind us of another saying attributed to him: 'No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Jesus reveals the Father in his complete self-giving love on the cross. 'From now on' we are able to know God because we have seen God finally revealed. The Psalmist gives expression to the desire arising from the human heart to see God: 'Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek' (Psalm 27:7-8). We find the same longing in the psalm which continues to be evoked in this section of the supper discourse: 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?' (Psalm 42:2).

Moses pleads with God that he might see God's face only to be told: 'You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live' (Exodus 33:20). Elijah journeyed to the mountain of Moses that he might see God. God revealed himself to him in mysterious ways, but, once again, Elijah could not see God's face. He had to cover his face with his mantle (1Kings 19:13).

We are being assured that to see Jesus loving 'to the end' (13:1) is to see God revealed. This seeing is, of course, a seeing-in-faith. We do not see God in God's transcendent mystery, but we do see God as God has chosen to reveal himself in our human condition. As John has already declared in the Prologue: 'We have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son' (1:14). For, while it remains true that 'no one has ever seen God' (1:18), the Son sees the Father and it is John's belief that 'it is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known' (1:18). Paul writes: 'It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2Corinthians 4:6). We do not know Jesus unless we know him as the revelation of God.

⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

⁸Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'

⁹Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?''

¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Jesus is repeating a theme already declared in his debate with 'the Jews': 'If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (10:37-38). We know the Father by knowing the Son (8:19). We see the Father by seeing the Son. This is because, as Jesus says: 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'.

Jesus is expressing in more intimate language what he has already claimed in identifying himself with the words of the God of the Exodus: 'I am' (see 4:26; 6:20; 8:58). In Jesus the redeemer God is active, bringing about the salvation of the world (4:42).

We can be sure of this on Jesus' word, for, as he has often claimed, he speaks only what the Father gives him to speak (8:28; 10:49-50). We will find Jesus' actions even more convincing, for he does only what his Father bids him do, so that in watching Jesus' deeds we can be sure that we are watching the actions of his Father (see already 5:36; 10:25; 10:37-38). The love with which he gave his life on the cross is Jesus' ultimate gift of himself and his final revelation of a God who holds back nothing in his love for us, who loves us 'to the end' (13:1).

In this farewell speech, Jesus is encouraging his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled. His death will come as a shock to them, but if they look closely they will see the profound communion which he has with his Father, and they will see his love for them, and therefore God's love for them. He may seem to be leaving them, but, as he says, 'I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am there you may be also' (14:3).

Opening with the words ‘Very, truly, I tell you’, Jesus shifts the focus to us. He is assuring us of two things. Firstly, we will continue to experience his presence in our lives because he will be continuing his mission through us. In fact, because he is returning to the glory which he had before the world existed (see 17:5), he will continue to bring about through his disciples his Father’s design for the world in ways that are greater than what they have witnessed to this point. We recall Jesus’ earlier words: ‘The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished’(5:20). Through the ministry of his disciples he will ‘gather into one the dispersed children of God’(11:52).

This will happen only if we are truly open to him. Notice Jesus’ words: ‘I will do’. It is Jesus who is working through his disciples. Our mission will bear fruit only to the extent that we are in communion with him in prayer (compare Mark 11:23-24; Matthew 18:19). When our prayer rises to God precisely from our communion with Jesus, being the prayer of Jesus’ himself, it will express God’s will and we will experience the presence and the power of Jesus in God’s response to our prayer.

The author of the First Letter of John writes: ‘if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us’(1John 5:14); also ‘we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him’(1John 3:22). This obedience is included in the idea of praying in Jesus’ name. Jesus’ whole desire is to reveal God and so to give glory to God (12:28). He will answer the prayers of his disciples because he wishes to continue this mission through us.

We might compare Jesus’ statement recorded by Luke: ‘I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened ... the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’(Luke 11:9-13). That Jesus can promise so confidently the positive response to our prayer presupposes that our prayer is imbued with Jesus’ Spirit. Paul too is confident that when we pray in the Spirit we are praying according to the will of God: ‘The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God’(Romans 8:26-27).

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

¹⁵If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

We have reached the climax of Jesus' farewell speech. Three times he insists on covenant love as being the essential response required of his disciples (14:15,21,23; compare 1John 2:3-4). Three times he assures them that they will not be left alone: the Spirit will be with them (14:16-17); he himself will be with them (14:18); and the Father will be with them (14:23). Each time he assures them that this intimate communion with the Spirit, with himself, and with the Father is something that only they as his disciples can experience.

Jesus has just been speaking of the mission which he is entrusting to his disciples. He is going to carry on his mission through them. Clearly they cannot do this on their own and so he promises them the gift of 'another Advocate to be with you forever'. We are reminded of the encouraging words of the prophet Haggai:

Take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

– Haggai 2:4-5

Earlier, Jesus insisted that his disciples love one another (13:34-35). Here he is calling for that special covenant love that will bind them to him (compare 8:42). We are meant to recall the words of Deuteronomy: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). There, too, this covenant love is to be expressed through obedience to God's commands: 'Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart' (Deuteronomy 6:6). In the same sense, to love Jesus is to keep his commandments, which means to keep his word, which means to believe in him as the one sent by the Father to invite us into the communion of love which he shares with the Father.

While the rest of the New Testament prefers to speak in terms of believing in Jesus (though see 1Peter 1:8), the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple is at home in calling us to love him. It is otherwise with Paul who only once speaks of our relationship with Jesus in terms of love (see Ephesians 6:24). One has the impression from this text that Paul reserves the word 'love' for the experience which we will have when we see Jesus face to face. John, on the other hand, is at home with using the word 'love' for that communion which we now have, in faith, with Jesus. Jesus' mission from the Father is to share with us the life of intimate communion which he experiences as the incarnate Word.

John speaks of this firstly as an experience of the Spirit. He has been preparing us for the coming of the Spirit from the beginning of his Gospel, The Baptist introduced Jesus as the one who 'baptises with the Holy Spirit' (1:33). Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being 'born of the Spirit' (3:8). It is this Spirit who 'gives life'(6:63).

We have been told that the Spirit will be given only when Jesus is glorified (7:39). Now that the 'hour' of Jesus being glorified has come, Jesus assures his disciples: 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever'. When, after Jesus' glorification they receive the Spirit they will recognise him because it is the same Spirit that has been with Jesus throughout his ministry (1:33). Jesus has spoken of himself as the 'truth'(14:6). His Spirit will be the 'Spirit of truth', for the Spirit will continue Jesus' mission of revealing God as a God of faithful love, a God of 'grace and truth'(1:17).

They have already experienced Jesus as God's 'Advocate', that is to say, the one whom God sent in response to their call for help. Jesus will continue to be their Advocate (see 1John 2:1), but not in the way they have experienced him to this point, for he is leaving this world to go to the Father. When he is glorified (7:39), it will be the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love that binds Jesus to the Father that will be sent to them to remain with them and to dwell in them (compare 1John 3:22-24; 4:4; 2John 2). The Spirit will enable them to be Jesus' instruments in continuing his mission of drawing everyone to himself and so to the Father.

Let us pause here to reflect on the same teaching as expressed by Paul:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?

– 1Corinthians 6:19

Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'

– Galatians 4:6

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

– Romans 5:5

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

– Romans 8:10-11

You were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

– Ephesians 1:13-14

18 I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?'

23 Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words;

and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

There is a close parallelism between 14:15-17 and 14:18-21. Having spoken of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in 14:15-17, John goes on in 14:18-21 to assure them that in experiencing this indwelling of the Holy Spirit they will be experiencing his continued communion with them. He is going away, but his Father's 'little children' (13:33) will not be left orphans. They will watch him die, but he will continue to live (5:26; 6:57), and they will live with his life.

Paul writes: 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). They will be 'saved by his life' (Romans 5:10). They will be 'made alive in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:22). Jesus has already spoken of his being in the Father and the Father being in him (see 10:38; 14:10,11). Now he adds: 'and you in me and I in you'. The life which Jesus came to give consists in sharing with him in the intimate communion which he enjoys with the Father (see 6:56-57; 14:3).

Once again, love is the condition for experiencing this intimate communion. This is not because God's offer of love is conditional. It is because we can receive love only in love. It is our receiving that is conditional upon our love, not God's giving. It is likely that the Judas mentioned here (he is sometimes called 'Jude' to help distinguish him from Judas Iscariot) is the man listed by Luke among the Twelve (see Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). The answer to his question is found in an understanding of the point just made. God is not restricting the revelation, but only those can receive it who listen and who, by loving, keep Jesus' word. This is because 'whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him' (1 John 2:5).

Jesus goes on to assure them that he and the Father will come to whoever believes in him (the invitation is open to all) and make their home with them. They can trust his word, for it is the word of God (7:16; 12:48-49; 14:10). Jesus began this discourse by speaking of the many dwelling places he was preparing. Here we learn that these dwelling places are the hearts and souls of his disciples which Jesus, in his love, is preparing to be homes for the indwelling of God.

Jesus speaks again of ‘the Advocate’(14:16), the ‘Spirit of truth’(14:17), identified now as ‘the Holy Spirit’(see 1:33). He speaks of the teaching role of the Holy Spirit, who will teach Jesus’ disciples everything by reminding them of what Jesus has said and done and by bringing them to an ever deeper realisation of the significance of what they have seen and heard. John has already given us two examples of this (see 2:21-22 and 12:16; compare Luke 24:6-8).

We find a similar statement in the First Letter of John: ‘The anointing that you received from Christ abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. His anointing teaches you about all things’(1John 2:27). Jesus’ mission is to reveal the Father. The Holy Spirit’s mission is to deepen the disciples’ understanding of Jesus’ revelation and to keep them faithful to it. This is achieved by our being continually drawn by the Spirit into the embrace which unites Jesus and the God he calls ‘Father’ in a communion which is Jesus’ incarnate experience of the union between the Word and God – a union in which the very being of God consists (see 1:1-2).

²⁵I have said these things to you while I am still with you.

²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

The peace which Jesus offers as his farewell gift is the Messianic peace promised by the prophets. Jesus is the ‘Prince of peace’ (Isaiah 9:6), God’s messenger ‘who announces peace’ (Isaiah 52:7). ‘Peace, peace, to the far and the near’ (Isaiah 57:19). ‘He shall command peace to the nations’ (Zechariah 9:10). It is the peace of the new covenant: ‘I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them’ (Ezekiel 37:26). It is the peace for which the Psalmist prays: ‘May the Lord bless his people with peace’ (Psalm 29:11).

Jesus repeats his earlier plea that we do not let our hearts be troubled (see 14:1) and he adds: ‘do not let them be afraid’. There is a fear that is an essential element in our relationship with the divine. It is traditionally called ‘the fear of the Lord’ and is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is an overwhelming sense of wonder and awe in the presence of the divine coupled with an awareness of our own weakness. It was experienced by Isaiah: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’ (Isaiah 6:5). It was experienced by Simon Peter who, while clinging to Jesus, cried: ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ (Luke 5:8).

Out of this fear faith can be born and nourished for it draws from us in our impotence a cry that reaches the heart of God. It is a fear that is quite compatible with the faith that ‘nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:39). This is not the fear that Jesus is warning his disciples against. Like the water in the jars at Cana this fear is finally transformed by grace into the wine of love.

The kind of fear against which Jesus is warning his disciples is the trepidation of heart that causes us to so focus on our own insecurity that we forget to cry out in faith to God. We may be powerless to prevent this fear or to put a stop to it when it comes over us, but we are not powerless in the way we respond to it. To simply give in to it is to be enslaved by it. We can take this feeling to prayer. We can remember with gratitude moments of love that have been real to us. We can learn to counteract the often nebulous and dysfunctional thoughts that are at the root of our feelings of fear. We are not powerless to respond to God’s encouraging grace. We need not be a victim of fear. Jesus is encouraging us, as he encouraged us earlier: ‘Believe in God, believe also in me’ (14:1).

Jesus has said to his disciples that he is going away (13:33; 14:4), but he has also said that he is going to come to them (14:3,18). He asks them to rise above their sadness and to think of what his going means to him. He is returning to the one he loves and to the glory that was his before the world existed (17:5). Furthermore, they must realise that this return is good for them. Throughout the whole Gospel Jesus has been drawing people to himself only so that he might share with them the life of the one he calls Father.

When Jesus is glorified he will be able to send his Spirit to his disciples (7:39). He will be able to come to them with his Father in a way that transcends the communion that he now has with them. The 'joy' which they are promised is the joy experienced by the Baptist when he heard the voice of the bridegroom (3:29), the joy of those who share Jesus' mission (4:36; see 15:11; 16:22). This joy is a fruit of the Spirit (20:20-21; see Galatians 5:22).

²⁸You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you."

If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me;

³¹but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Rise, let us be on our way.

‘The ruler of this world is coming’. As Jesus says to those who have come to take him to trial and death: ‘This is your hour, and the power of darkness!’ (Luke 22:53). It will appear that Jesus is the victim and that he is being crushed by evil. But, as Jesus has already declared: ‘the ruler of this world will be driven out’ (12:31).

We are reminded that as we follow the story of the Passion, we are watching something that Jesus is doing freely: ‘For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father’ (10:17-18).

We will see the terrible things that others do to Jesus. But we must not be distracted. We must keep our eyes on him and we will see the communion with his Father that sustains him throughout his passion. His suffering did not separate him from the love of his Father. Throughout it he remained obedient, and so was able to continue giving himself in love. In this way he continued to carry out the mission given him by the Father. As he said earlier: ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work’ (4:34). ‘I know him and I keep his word’ (8:55). For the only time in the whole of the New Testament this complete obedience of Jesus to his Father (compare Luke 22:42) is identified as ‘love’ (14:31). This is the same covenant love which he asks of us (see commentary on 14:15).

The last words of chapter fourteen echo Jesus’ words recorded in Mark 14:42. It seems that in an earlier edition of the Gospel chapter fourteen was followed by chapter eighteen which begins: ‘After Jesus had spoken these words he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley’. Another member of the community of the Beloved Disciple left the text as he found it, but he wanted to include other reflections, probably also from the Beloved Disciple, or at any rate from the same tradition and community, so he inserted them here in what we have as chapters fifteen to seventeen. It is to these that we will now turn our attention.