

ADDITIONS TO THE SUPPER DISCOURSE
JOHN 15:1 – 17:26

The author of the Gospel seems to have chosen to end the supper discourse at 14:31, just as he seems to have concluded the Gospel at 20:31 where he states:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

– John 20:30-31

After the death of the Beloved Disciple a member of his community thought it important to add one more of these ‘signs’ and so he added chapter twenty-one as an appendix. He, too, was aware that much more could have been included:

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

– John 21:25

At an earlier stage, it seems that someone else in the community added chapters fifteen to seventeen. Like Jesus’ other discourses this material seems to come from the homiletic reflections of the Beloved Disciple. The sayings of Jesus included here were addressed to ‘his own’. Since they express the mind and heart of Jesus when his ‘hour’ finally came, they have been included here in the setting of the Last Supper. This editorial process is not unlike that used by the author of the Gospel according to Matthew in composing the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), or by Luke who gathered various sayings of Jesus on discipleship and fitted them into Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51 - 19:28).

Since there is no change of scene involved here, we will deal with the various additional units one by one, confident that the author is giving us from his mature reflection privileged insights into the mind and heart of Jesus. As with the supper discourse (13:31 – 14:31), so here, we are meant to imagine Jesus continuing his farewell speech to ‘his own’ at their final supper together. At the same time we are listening to Jesus speaking from the cross and at times from the glory of his risen life.

1. The vine and the branches

Whatever the original setting in which Jesus used this illustration, it fits perfectly into the setting of the Last Supper. This gospel does not present the supper as a formal celebration of the Passover. According to John the Passover was to take place after sunset on the Friday of Jesus' crucifixion. The meal which Jesus shares with 'his own', however, takes place just before the Passover (13:1) and the mood of the festival permeates the supper discourse.

One of the blessing prayers of the Passover meal was a prayer over the cup that the day would come when the Messianic promise would be fulfilled and God's people would drink new wine in God's kingdom. John has already linked wine with the gift of the Spirit in the wedding feast of Cana. Now that the 'hour' has come for Jesus to pour forth the Spirit in pouring forth his lifeblood for us, it is fitting that we should listen to him reminding us that he is the 'true vine' always bearing the fruit of love for his Father. He is reminding his beloved disciples that they belong to him as branches belong to a vine that is being cared for by the Father.

The image used here by Jesus can be found in the writings of the prophets. Isaiah likens Israel to a vineyard in the care of the Lord. His hope is that 'in the days to come Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit' (Isaiah 27:6). Isaiah is critical of the vineyard because the Lord whom he calls 'my beloved' and who cares so well for his vineyard, 'expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes' (Isaiah 5:2). Jeremiah recognised the need to strip away branches from the vine, branches which 'are not the Lord's' (Jeremiah 5:10). Hosea, too, is critical of Israel, God's 'luxuriant vine' that continues to be unfaithful to the covenant (Hosea 10:1). He hopes that the people will repent and 'blossom like a vine' (Hosea 14:7). Ezekiel warns that God is going to punish the inhabitants of Jerusalem 'like the wood of the vine which I have given to the fire for fuel' (Ezekiel 15:6), and he laments:

Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard transplanted by the water, fruitful and full of branches from abundant water. Its strongest stem became a ruler's sceptre; it towered aloft among the thick boughs; it stood out in its height with its mass of branches. But it was plucked up in fury, cast down to the ground; the east wind dried it up; its fruit was stripped off, its strong stem was withered; the fire consumed it. Now it is transplanted into the wilderness, into a dry and thirsty land. And fire has gone out from its stem, has consumed its branches and fruit, so that there remains in it no strong stem, no sceptre for ruling.

– Ezekiel 19:10-14 (compare Psalm 80:8-18)

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴Abide in me as I abide in you.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁵I am the vine, you are the branches.

Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Jesus is speaking to 'his own' who have already been 'cleansed' by Jesus' word which they have welcomed (the Greek verb translated 'cleansed' was earlier translated 'prune', 15:2). As Incarnate Wisdom Jesus is inviting us: 'Like the vine I bud forth delights, and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit. Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits' (Sirach 24:17,19). He wants to share with us his life so that we will blossom and bring forth fruit for God: 'Abide in me as I abide in you'. It is because he abides in us that we are enabled to abide in him, but we are free to accept or reject him (1John 2:2,27-28).

He longs for us to bear fruit. How can we be close to him and not share the longing he has to 'draw all people to myself'(12:32). As he said earlier: 'I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also' (10:16). It is the privilege and the joy of Jesus' disciples to work that this should come about. The fruit of love gives glory to God for it causes God's beauty to be radiantly obvious. This fruit comes from the heart of Jesus, God's Son. His love, his Spirit is the sap which fills the branches so long as they remain attached to the vine (compare 1John 3:24, 4:13-16). In communion with Jesus, we can call on all the power of God's love, for God wills everyone to live 'abundantly' (10:10). God wants the whole world to be transformed by love.

Jesus' words cannot but cause us to think of the Eucharist, the 'fruit of the vine'(Mark 14:25; Matthew 26:29) which Jesus offers his disciples with the words: 'This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many'(Mark 14:24; Matthew 26:28). He has already said: 'Those who drink my blood abide in me, and I in them' (6:56).

Jesus is the *true* vine because he is the source of the only real life, the life that comes 'from above'(3:3). 'You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God'(1Peter 1:23). We are like branches receiving our life from him. This will be seen by the fruit which we bear. Dead branches must be cut away, thrown into the fire and burned. Live branches must be pruned.

Jesus is careful to instruct his disciples how this pruning is to take place. He does not suggest that we do the pruning ourselves. We lack the wisdom for that. Rather he invites us to listen to his word for ‘indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account’ (Hebrews 4:12-13). Jesus’ word will do the pruning, cutting away whatever resists life and directing all our energy to doing the will of God. Jesus wants this word to abide in us (5:38): ‘Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father’ (1John 2:24). In this way we will enjoy deeper communion with Jesus and carry on his mission in more effective ways.

There is pain in the pruning, for, as Jesus has already said about himself: ‘unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’ (12:24). Jesus’ focus here, however, is not on the pain or on the need to die to self. He is not asking us to do the pruning ourselves, but to cling close to him. ‘On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’ (14:20). We are ‘sharing in the blood of Christ’ (1Corinthians 10:16). The pruning is not to be feared for it is not destructive. It will happen in the wisest way, for it will be done by the delicate hand of our loving ‘vinegrower’, God himself. Our hearts will be cleansed by believing in Jesus’ word (see Acts 15:9).

The key insight which Jesus is sharing with his disciples is that we will indeed bear much fruit if we abide in him, for ‘apart from me you can do nothing’. He who is speaking these words is the Word of God ‘apart from whom not one thing came into being’ (1:3). It is not that we do nothing (Jesus has already said that we will do even greater works than he, 14:12). What Jesus is saying is that we will not do these things apart from him. We are being called to let go of our ego. We are being called to be like a ‘little child’ joyfully receiving from him the love that will radiate out to others and draw them to him and so to the Father. Paul learned this: ‘Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God’ (2Corinthians 3:5). ‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me’ (Philippians 4:13). Let us abide in him.

⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

In the context of bearing fruit and so of the apostolic mission of his disciples, Jesus repeats his earlier promise that he will be with us when we call to him in prayer (see 14:13-14). Sometimes our prayers are unwise. They arise from our felt needs but not from our communion with God. Sometimes our prayers are inspired by God but we are wrong in our expectations of the timing of our seeing the effects of God's response. God's response to prayer is always immediate, but we or others for whom we pray may not yet be ready to receive the grace God is offering. Jesus encourages us to present our requests simply to God. He encourages us also, once we have made our request, to leave it trustingly in the hands and in the heart of God.

God knows what is best for us and always listens to our prayer. He will always respond, not necessarily in the way we want but in the most delicately loving way, for God knows best (see 1John 5:14). Jesus assures us that when we pray in his name, that is, when our prayers arise out of our communion with him and out of our obedience to his word (see 8:31; also 1John 3:22), our requests will be granted (see 14:13-14). In all our prayers our focus is to be on abiding in him, knowing that he abides in us.

Jesus' mission is to reveal his Father to the world by drawing all people to himself. We come to know the Father by sharing in Jesus' own intimate communion with him. This love radiating in the world is the glory of God. When we live his life we share in his mission and so give glory to his Father (see 14:13). When Jesus chose the Twelve, he chose them firstly to be with him. It was only as his companions, living in communion with him, that he sent them out as missionaries to others (see Mark 3:14). We can carry out Jesus' mission only to the extent that we abide in him.

Jesus has already spoken of his love for us (13:1; 13:34; 14:21). Now he tells us that the love which he has for us has its origin in the love which his Father has for him. It is the human expression of the intimate communion which is the very being of God. With the Beloved Disciple (13:23), we are being invited to be with Jesus ‘close to the Father’s heart’(1:18). On an earlier occasion Jesus said that the life he lives is ‘because of the Father’, and he added: ‘whoever eats me will live because of me’(6:57). Here he is identifying that life as one of love and assuring us that it is this very same love that he is giving us. He invites us to abide in it, to make it our permanent home.

Once again Jesus insists on the necessary link between love and obedience (see 13:34; 14:15,21-24). The Father continues to hold Jesus in love and Jesus freely and joyfully commits himself to doing whatever his Father asks of him (8:29; 14:31). He encourages us to do the same. It is in doing God’s will that we, like Jesus, will find our joy (15:11; see 4:36).

Jesus repeats here the commandment given earlier: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’(see 13:34). The fountain of love that has poured into the heart of Jesus from his Father and which he in turn has poured into the hearts of his disciples, is to continue to be poured out in their mutual love. This is clearly not simply a love of friendship. It is not the kind of love which we experience with people who treat us well. It is not a response to an obviously attractive quality which other people might exhibit. It is our sharing in the kind of creative love which God has and which Jesus reveals.

As Paul says: ‘God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us’(Romans 5:8). It is the kind of love which Paul urges on us: ‘Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us’(Ephesians 5:2). If we remain in the vine, we will produce the fruit of the vine. It will be a self-giving love whereby we lay down our lives for others (15:13). This is the love of the good shepherd (10:11), the love shown by Jesus who gives his ‘flesh for the life of the world’(6:51). This mutual love is the main theme of the First Letter of John (see 1John 3:11,23; 4:7,11; also 2John 5).

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Jesus' love is something more than a simple response to the loveableness which he finds in us. His love is creative. It transforms us giving us a special quality that is the fruit of the love which he offers. He is Incarnate Wisdom which 'renews all things: in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God'(Wisdom 7:27). In transforming us, his love makes us able, in our turn, to love with his love: 'We love because he first loved us'(1John 4:19). We remain, like Jesus himself, servants of the Lord (see 15:20). The love which Jesus has for us, however, goes beyond that given by a master to his servants. We are his 'friends', his beloved disciples, chosen by him (see 6:70; 13:18). Pope Gregory the Great makes a play with the Latin and defines a friend (*amicus*) as a guardian of the soul (*animi custos*): 'It is not without reason therefore that a person who does Jesus' will in carrying out his commandments is called his friend'(Moralia 27.8).

Just as the Israelites appointed Levites to carry out their sacred function (Numbers 8:10) and Moses appointed Joshua to carry on his mission (Numbers 27:18), so Jesus, in this his farewell speech, appoints his disciples 'as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved' (Colossians 3:12) to continue his mission in the world, to 'go and bear fruit, fruit that will last'. The fruit to which he is referring is especially the life of communion with God enjoyed by 'the dispersed children of God'(11:52) who are attracted to Jesus and so to the Father by the life of love lived by Jesus' disciples. Jesus was sent for this and it is this that will glorify his Father (see 14:12-13).

For the third time Jesus reminds us that it is God's mission, not ours. We will be instruments of God's love only to the extent that we are in communion with God, and so only to the extent that we pray. When we pray in his name, that is to say, when our prayer arises out of our union with him, we can be sure that our prayer will be heard (see 14:13-14; 15:7).

It is the enduring love of God that sustains, nourishes and inspires the disciple. It is God's love that makes it possible for us to be channels of love to others and to draw others to enjoy the intimate life of love lived by Jesus. Verse seventeen can be translated simply: 'This I command you: Love one another'.

2. Discipleship and persecution

When John looks at the world he is moved by the love which God has for it: ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life’(3:16). Jesus’ heart wanted to embrace the whole world and bring everyone to share the life which he experienced with the Father: ‘I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness ... I came to save the world’(12:46-47). He ‘takes away the sin of the world’(1:29) by giving his ‘flesh for the life of the world’(6:51).

The intimate communion with God that Jesus is offering to the world cannot come ‘from below’(8:23), from ‘flesh’(6:63), from ‘the world’. It can come only ‘from above’, ‘from the Spirit’, from Jesus, ‘God the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart’(1:18). Yet when John looks generally at people’s response, he concludes that, ‘the world did not know him’(1:10). Though people have seen Jesus and have heard his words, they refuse to believe in him (6:36; 10:25-26; 12:37-40). They refuse to allow his word to penetrate their hearts (8:37). ‘People loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed’(3:19-20). ‘The world hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil’(7:7). The world ‘cannot receive the Spirit of truth’(14:17). It is this world to which John is referring in this section: the world that does not want to see the light or hear the word because it does not want to know the truth, the world that denies Jesus (1John 2:23) and rejects his revelation (2John 9).

Jesus is warning his disciples to expect the same kind of rejection which he himself has received (compare 1John 3:13). Peter writes: ‘Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps’(1Peter 2:21). The Prologue warned us that darkness would try to overpower Jesus (1:15). The first indication of this was when Jesus healed the sick man at the pool of Beth-zatha. The religious authorities objected to his breaking the Sabbath and were further infuriated by the claims he was making in referring to God as his Father. They determined to kill him (5:18).

Jesus speaks of hate and of love. Neither word is descriptive primarily of an emotion, though of course emotions are not excluded. To love is to choose and to be faithful to that choice. To hate is to reject.

¹⁸If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.

¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own.

Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you.

²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, “Servants are not greater than their master.”

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you;

if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.

²¹But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Much of Part One dealt with Jesus’ debates with the religious authorities and their failed attempts to have him arrested and killed. His disciples are to expect the same treatment: ‘servants are not greater than their master’ (quoting 13:16). The persecution and the hatred which they will experience will come from the same source as that experienced by Jesus and for the same reasons.

The other Gospels also record Jesus’ warning: ‘you will be hated by all because of my name’ (Matthew 10:22; also Matthew 24:9). Matthew even quotes in this context the same saying: ‘A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master’ (Matthew 10:24).

People have not taken Jesus’ word to heart. They are not going to welcome the word of his disciples. This is primarily because of Jesus’ name, that is to say, because of who Jesus claims to be. In spite of their religious posturing, both ‘the Jews’ (see 1:19) and the Gentiles who reject Jesus and so reject his disciples ‘do not know God’. This has been a constant theme throughout the Gospel (see 5:37,42; 6:45; 7:28; 8:54-55; 16:3).

As we read in the First Letter of John: ‘They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us’ (1John 4:5-6). This echoes the words of God spoken through the prophet Ezekiel: ‘The house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart’ (Ezekiel 3:7).

People can reject Jesus' disciples for a host of reasons and in doing so they may think that they are rejecting Jesus. If the Jesus presented to them is false, then obviously in rejecting this false Jesus they may not be rejecting Jesus even though they might think that they are (see commentary on 14:6). We should not take it upon ourselves to apportion blame. Jesus is speaking here of those who have heard his words and have seen his actions and have not only failed to believe him but have rejected him and have set about to be rid of him. 'They have no excuse for their sin' (see 9:41). As he said to them on an earlier occasion: 'you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word' (8:37).

In rejecting Jesus they are rejecting his Father. This is because Jesus' words are his Father's words: 'He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure' (3:34). 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own' (John 7:16-17).

Jesus' actions are 'signs' that reveal the love (the 'glory') of his Father (1:14). We are reminded of God's complaint: 'What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?' (Isaiah 5:4). What Jesus has done among them bears witness to the fact that Jesus has come from God: 'The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me' (5:36). 'The Father who dwells in me does his works' (14:10). They show that 'the Father is in me and I am in the Father' (10:38). If we are in communion with the real God and if the real Jesus is presented to us, we will recognise him and love him. How people express this love is too vast and mysterious for us to define, but, as Jesus has already said: 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (13:35).

In an effort to give some perspective on people's rejection of Jesus, John turned earlier to the prophecies of Isaiah (see 12:37-40). Now we hear Jesus referring to Psalm 69:4. By the time John is writing Christian Jews have been excluded from the Synagogue (see commentary on 9:22). Hence he speaks of *their* law. The hatred experienced by the psalmist should have led us to expect Jesus and his disciples to experience a similar hatred.

²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin;

but now they have no excuse for their sin.

²³Whoever hates me hates my Father also.

²⁴If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin.

But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.

²⁵It was to fulfil the word that is written in their law,

"They hated me without a cause".

²⁶When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.

²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

Matthew, too, records the promise made by Jesus that in times of persecution his disciples would experience his Spirit sustaining them and witnessing to him through them:

They will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

– Matthew 10:17-20

The disciples will suffer persecution, but they are not to lose heart. Supported by the Spirit of love which Jesus shares with the Father, they will be witnessing to Jesus by their words and actions (compare Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). Their witness is of special importance ‘because you have been with me from the beginning’. We recall Peter’s words when Matthias ‘was added to the eleven apostles’ (Acts 1:26): ‘One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection’ (Acts 1:21-22).

While it was the Roman prefect who passed the sentence condemning Jesus to crucifixion, he did so at the instigation and insistence of the Jewish religious authorities. Paul confesses that he was responsible for persecuting the followers of Jesus: ‘You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors’ (Galatians 1:13-14). He thought that in killing Jesus’ disciples he was ‘offering worship to God’, and so he can say of others like him: ‘I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened’ (Romans 10:2). The killing of Stephen (Acts 7:58-60) and of John’s brother, James (Acts 12:2-3) are two notorious examples of the kind of persecution suffered by Jewish Christians at the hands of the Jewish authorities.

In the earliest extant writing of the New Testament (c.50AD) we read:

You became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.

– 1Thessalonians 2:14-16

Systematic excommunication of Jewish Christians from the synagogue dates from the Council of Jamnia (c.80AD). This involved an isolation that was social and economic as well as religious. It also made it easier for Roman authorities to scape-goat Christians when the opportunity arose, for it removed them from the protection provided by Roman law to Jews.

Jesus has just been warning his disciples to expect to be hated by the world (compare Matthew 10:17; 24:9). The ‘stumbling’ mentioned in this text is that of giving up one’s faith and leaving the community. Matthew records Jesus as saying: ‘Many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another’ (Matthew 24:10). John is reminding his community of Jesus’ warning and also of his promise to remain with them through the presence of his Spirit.

¹I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling.

²They will put you out of the synagogues.

Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.

³And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me.

⁴But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

^{4b}I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

⁵But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?"

⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.

3. Reviewing Jesus' farewell speech

While many of the themes from Jesus' farewell speech (13:33 - 14:31) recur here, the perspective is different. A new situation of persecution and the apparent failure of the Gospel to find a welcome in the world has caused the community to re-examine its faith under the guidance of Jesus' Spirit. As we listen to Jesus speaking with his disciples on the eve of his passion, we are listening to him instructing the community of the Beloved Disciple. His words continue to have meaning for us.

When Jesus declares that he did not say 'these things' from the beginning, the following words indicate that he is referring primarily to his leaving them. The author is taking us back to the opening words of the supper discourse (13:33). However, when Jesus first declared that his 'hour' had come, he spoke of the necessity of his dying and told his disciples that if they wished to serve him they would have to follow him: 'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit ... Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also' (12:24,26).

In placing these reflection here just after Jesus' words concerning persecution, the author may intend 'these things' to refer not only to Jesus' absence but also to the sufferings which Jesus' disciples are undergoing.

In the supper discourse John has both Peter (13:36) and Thomas (14:5) asking Jesus where he is going. Here in this alternative reflection sorrow has so filled the hearts of the disciples that no one is saying anything (16:5). The last person to ask a question of Jesus was Jude in 14:22. Since then we have heard only from Jesus.

In the supper discourse Jesus said: 'If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I' (14:28). Much the same idea is being expressed here. The Spirit is Jesus' gift to us. He can send the Spirit to us only from the intimacy which he will have with the Father once he is glorified. Furthermore we are able to receive the Spirit which Jesus is offering only in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Prior to the coming of his 'hour' he is with us, but with all the necessary limitations that are part of the human condition. Once glorified he will be able to be present to us internally, through the Spirit which he (15:26) and the Father (14:16,26) will send. We will know him 'from the inside' and experience him moving in our hearts and minds, drawing us into his own communion with the Father.

We recall Jesus' words on the occasion of the festival of Booths: 'On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."' John goes on to comment: 'Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (John 7:37-39). It is through the action of the Spirit that we will be born again into the life of God (1:12-13; 3:5). The Spirit will give us a share in the love that binds Jesus to his Father. As Paul says: 'Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Romans 5:5).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, his disciples experienced his continued presence among them, sustaining them and inspiring them to carry out the mission of love entrusted to them. They missed him because he was no longer with them 'in the flesh', but they experienced his continued intimacy because he was still with them 'in the Spirit'. While Jesus was physically with them, he showed them that it was possible to experience intimacy with God, and to share this love with others. With his glorification, he was able to empower his disciples to live his life. Because he lived, they would live (14:19). Empowered by his Spirit, they would extend his mission throughout the world. We recall Peter's words at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-33):

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.
Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having
received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has
poured out this that you both see and hear.

**Nevertheless
I tell you
the truth:
it is to your ad-
vantage
that I go away,
for if I do not
go away,
the Advocate
will not come
to you;
but if I go,
I will send him
to you.**

⁸And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:

⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me;

¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer;

¹¹about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

In the supper discourse John has already included Jesus' words promising to send the Advocate, 'the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him' (14:17). The Spirit is going to bear witness to Jesus through the lives of Jesus' disciples, especially through their fidelity to love in the midst of persecution. The world is going to be just as blind to their witness as it has been to that of Jesus. However for anyone with eyes to see, the Spirit, through the lives of Jesus' disciples, is going to demonstrate how wrong the world is on three counts.

Firstly, the Spirit will show how wrong the world is about sin. Jesus was condemned as a sinner (9:24). His accusers saw him as one who disregarded the will of God. He was, in their eyes, a blasphemer (10:33). Jesus has shown, and his Spirit present in the disciples will continue to show, that sin consists primarily in refusing to believe in him (16:9; compare 1John 3:6), that is to say, refusing to believe in the revelation which he gives through word and deed of who God really is and how God wants us to respond to his love. Sinners are those who will not let the word of God penetrate their minds and hearts and so refuse the communion of love being offered them by Jesus. This means that they are incapable of sharing this love with others.

Secondly, the Spirit will show how wrong the world is about righteousness ('justice'). This is the only time this concept appears in John's Gospel. Throughout the New Testament it refers primarily to God's righteousness, that is to say, God's fidelity in always acting according to who God is. It refers secondarily to human righteousness, that is to say, how we are to live in obedience to God's will. The world has a wrong concept of God and so sees God's righteousness wrongly. It follows that the world has a wrong idea of God's will and so of the behaviour that constitutes human righteousness.

Jesus was condemned to death in God's name, and he has just warned his disciples: 'an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God' (16:2). His rising to life, demonstrated by his powerful presence in the lives of his disciples, is God's vindication of his innocence (see 1Timothy 3:16). His enemies and the persecutors of his disciples do not know God. They have forgotten the teaching of Deuteronomy:

The Lord your God is God ... who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.

– Deuteronomy 10:17-20

God is righteous: God liberates the oppressed and sets the captives free. Jesus demonstrates this in his actions and in his teaching. His ‘going to the Father’(16:10; compare 14:12), his death and resurrection, would demonstrate this truth for all who were willing to see, as would the heroic lives of his disciples, faithful to love in the midst of rejection and persecution. When Jesus says ‘you will see me no longer’ (16:10), he is not contradicting his earlier promise: ‘In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me’(14:19). Here he is speaking of the ending of his physical presence to his disciples because he has gone to the Father. His earlier statement was speaking of another way of seeing, a faith-seeing, a recognising his continued presence through the action in their lives of his Spirit.

Thirdly, the Spirit will show how wrong the world is about judgment (16:11). Those who rejected Jesus thought that they could condemn Jesus to death. The presence and action of the Spirit in the lives of Jesus’ disciples, however, demonstrates that Jesus is alive. He is victorious over death. It is the ‘ruler of this world’ who is condemned. Though ‘the whole world lies under the power of the evil one’(1John 5:19; see Ephesians 2:2), ‘the ruler of this world will be driven out’(12:31). Evil has no power over Jesus (14:30) and while those who are united to Jesus in love will have to continue to struggle (see Ephesians 6:12), evil has no control over them.

¹²I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;

for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears,

and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

As in the supper discourse (14:26), so here, Jesus goes on to speak of the role of the Spirit as teacher. Once again he calls him 'the Spirit of truth'(14:17; 15:26). Jesus has revealed the Father to them: 'I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father'(15:15; compare 12:49; 14:10). The Spirit speaks only the words of Jesus.

The Spirit does this in two ways. Firstly, 'he will remind you of all that I have said to you'(14:26). It is only when they are able to reflect back in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection that they are able to grasp the significance of his words and actions. John has already given us examples of this (see 2:22; 12:16; 13:7). It is Jesus' Spirit who makes this growth in understanding possible. Secondly, Jesus will continue to speak to them through the Spirit. John's Gospel is itself an example of this.

The fullness of truth towards which the Spirit guides the Christian community is before all else the constant perfecting of their understanding of Jesus and so of the nature of God which it is Jesus' mission to reveal. The Prologue is one statement of this, as is the hymn found in the Letter to the Colossians 1:15-20.

What does Jesus mean when he says of the Spirit: 'He will declare to you the things that are to come'? At first glance Jesus might appear to be saying that the Spirit will reveal future happenings to them. Since there is no past and no future in God, it follows that everything that is, everything that has ever been and everything that will one day be, is present to God. Strictly speaking we should not speak of God as remembering or as foreseeing. God sees. God does not foreknow. God knows. Everything that is, in whatever time frame it might be in relation to our present moment, is present to God. It follows that God can reveal what is present to him to whomever he chooses. Is Jesus referring to this?

Foretelling the future is a very secondary aspect of biblical prophecy. The prophet is one who is so in tune with God that he or she sees the present with God-given insight. The prophets of Israel are addressing themselves to their contemporaries and they are concerned with contemporary situations and attitudes, including the implications of the present for the future of those whom they are addressing and their children and grandchildren. They are promising them that right action will bring a blessing and that failure to listen to God's word will bring its own punishment.

When they speak of the future in general terms, their language is non-specific and highly imaginative. They are expressing their faith in God's love and fidelity and encouraging their contemporaries to hope. In a similar way those who were especially gifted to speak for God in the early Christian community were called 'prophets'. They, too, were concerned with their contemporary situation. They were not speaking words which neither they nor their contemporaries could possibly understand and that would make sense only to some distant future generation.

Therefore, without excluding the possibility of God revealing future events, it is more likely that what Jesus is saying is that the Spirit will say again to future generations what Jesus has said. This 'saying again' is the classical meaning of the Greek verb used here by John (*anagelein*). The Spirit will declare the true meaning of 'things that are to come' by saying again in new circumstances what Jesus has revealed. Let us pray with the Psalmist: 'Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long' (Psalm 25:5). 'Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path' (Psalm 143:10).

The Gospel upon which we are commenting and the other works accepted by the Church as part of the New Testament are a precious fruit of the inspiration of God's Spirit. The various writings give expression to the living faith of the first generation of disciples and are inspired by the Spirit of Jesus who leads Jesus' disciples to the complete truth and assists them to understand their lives in the light of all that Jesus did and taught. Jesus' Spirit is still with the Church and the work of enlightening continues. The tradition of the Church can never contradict the Scriptures for it comes from the same source. Furthermore, the Scriptures remain a norm of faith and confirm our understanding of the movement of the Spirit down through the ages. We must not, however, confine ourselves to them in the expectation that the Spirit has given the complete answer to our questions by revealing their true meaning to Christians of the first century. We must continue to listen to Jesus' Spirit present now in our lives, for we belong to a living vine and we are to bring forth fruit that will continue to attract each other to belief in Jesus that we 'may have life in his name' (20:31).

I will see you again

¹⁶A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.

¹⁷Then some of his disciples said to one another, ‘What does he mean by saying to us, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me”; and “Because I am going to the Father”?’ ¹⁸They said, ‘What does he mean by this “a little while”? We do not know what he is talking about.’

¹⁹Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, ‘Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me”?’

²⁰Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.

²¹When a woman is in labour, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.

²²So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

²³On that day you will ask nothing of me.

As always in John Jesus knows what his disciples are thinking. John is constantly reminding us that we are listening to the Word of God (compare 2:24-25; 4:17-18). Jesus explains that when he says ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me’, he is speaking of his imminent departure, the thought of which has already caused sorrow to fill their hearts (16:6). They will ‘weep and mourn’ and experience ‘pain’ and ‘anguish’.

Jesus goes on to explain that when he says ‘Again a little while and you will see me’, he is assuring them that his dying will issue in life – for him and for them: ‘I will see you again’; ‘you will see me again’. This could include a reference to the communion which they will experience when, upon their own death, they follow him into the full embrace of God and the beatific vision (see 13:36). We find this idea expressed in the First Letter of John: ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (1John 3:2). However long they may have to wait, it will be ‘a little while’ compared to the eternity of bliss that awaits them.

However, in the present context, it seems more likely that he is referring to the faith-experience of communion with him which they will have in the Spirit: ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’ (14:18-20; compare 14:3).

Jesus’ suffering will issue in joy. Their suffering at his death and the suffering which they experience through persecution will likewise issue in joy as they experience deeper communion with him: ‘You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice’ (Isaiah 66:14; see also Isaiah 35:10; 51:11).

Pain that is life-giving has a natural association with the pain experienced by a woman in giving birth. The comparison is traditional. However, the word translated here 'anguish' is the Greek *thlipsis*, traditionally associated with the final struggle against evil: 'In those days there will be suffering (*thlipsis*), such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be' (Mark 13:19; see Daniel 12:1). Jesus is about to face the power of darkness and evil and to conquer it. There is perhaps a hint here of a truth expressed in the Letter to the Colossians: 'I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church' (Colossians 1:24). In suffering as they are the community of the Beloved Disciple is sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Jesus assures them that when they see him giving his life for them and when they experience communion with him through his gift of the Spirit they will no longer need to seek understanding from him. The Spirit will make everything clear for them as he guides them 'into all the truth' (16:13).

²³Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name.

Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

²⁵I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father.

Jesus turns now to a second kind of asking: not the asking for understanding to which he has just referred but the asking for grace and help in living our lives and carrying on the mission entrusted to us. This, of course, will continue and Jesus repeats a promise made earlier: 'I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it' (14:13-14). 'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you' (15:7). 'You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name' (15:16; compare Mark 11:24; James 1:5-6).

Here again Jesus stresses the need to pray 'in my name'. When prayer is offered by one who believes in Jesus and shares his life and who expresses a desire that comes from communion with him, it expresses the longing of his Spirit. It will be answered. We recall Paul's words: '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).

Prayer is the experience of a branch that is open to the life of the vine. It includes the listening which enables our hearts to respond with Jesus' sentiments. It is our breathing with the breath of Jesus' Spirit. It bears fruit in love, 'peace' (14:27) and 'joy' (compare 15:11).

Jesus promises too that when the 'hour' comes he will speak 'plainly' to them of the Father. The word translated here 'plainly' can also mean 'boldly'. The idea seems to be that he will speak to them through his Spirit in a way that will enable them to speak 'boldly' of what he has revealed to them. Only with his glorification and the gift of his Spirit will they be able to come to a true understanding of what before that he can only indicate through illustrations.

The mysteries revealed by Jesus can be received only when we are born from above (3:3-6, 31-32). As Jesus said earlier: 'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But 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' (14:25-26).

Returning once again to the intimacy of the communion which he will have with them and the help which they will receive in response to their petitions, Jesus assures them that he will no longer be an intermediary between them and the Father. He is not denying his intercessory role (see 14:16; 1John 2:1). Rather, he is saying that he will no longer need to be an intermediary because they will enjoy such an intimate relationship with both him and his Father: 'On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you' (14:20). This latter text continues: '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 ... 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' (14:21,23).

The word for love in the text just quoted is *agapân*, covenant-love. In the present text Jesus speaks of *philein* rather than *agapân*. This may be only a matter of stylistic variation. If, however, the author intends a different nuance, Jesus seems here to be accenting the aspect of affective communion. He also speaks of belief rather than obedience, though as we saw when examining John's teaching on belief (see commentary on 2:11), belief and obedience are intimately related.

²⁶On that day you will ask in my name.

I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf;

²⁷for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

The Father is with me

²⁸I came from the Father and have come into the world; again,

I am leaving the world and am going to the Father.'

²⁹His disciples said, 'Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech!

³⁰Now we know that you know all things, and do not need to have anyone question you; by this we believe that you came from God.'

³¹Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe?

³²The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone.

Jesus' words to 'his own' are drawing to a close. We are listening to the Word-made-flesh and are reminded that he has come from the Father to us and is going back to the Father. This movement was first described in the Prologue. Jesus brings God to the world and lifts the world to God. We recall the words of Isaiah:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

– Isaiah 55:10-11

The disciples are too self-assured. Just as Jesus had to correct Peter (see 13:36-38), so he corrects them. They might think that they understand, but they will soon scatter, leaving Jesus to face his struggle alone. Mark records this same warning given by Jesus as they left the supper room and were on their way to the Mount of Olives: 'You will all become deserters; for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered' (Mark 14:27, quoting Zechariah 13:7; see Mark 14:50).

Jesus is about to face his agony alone, but he is not alone. As he said earlier: 'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (8:29). John's community must take courage from this, for they are not alone either. Like Jesus they will triumph through the persecution which they are encountering because of their union with him (see 15:18 - 16:4). Let us pray with Paul: 'Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 15:57).

In him we will experience peace: 'Peace 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' (14:27). Saint Augustine writes:

Peace consists in serenity of mind, tranquillity of soul, simplicity of heart, the bond of love and charity which makes us one. We cannot receive this peace as our inheritance from the Lord if we refuse to observe his testament of peace. We cannot enjoy peace with Christ if we are enemies with those who belong to him.

– De Verbo Domini, Sermon 59

Jesus' final statement is echoed in a Letter from the community of the Beloved Disciple: 'Whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?' (1 John 5:4-5; see also 1 John 2:13-14).

^{32b}Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.

³³I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,

²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

4. Jesus' Prayer

Still following the model of Moses' farewell speech in Deuteronomy, the author concludes the supper discourse with Jesus praying to his Father. As with the discourse itself, we are meant to hear Jesus speaking at the last supper. As he prepares to leave his disciples, he is offering them the desires of his heart as a parting gift. But the Jesus to whom we are listening is also speaking to us from the cross and from the timeless and eternal glory which he enjoys with the Father. Many of the themes that have been presented in the supper discourse and in the additional reflections are gathered up into his prayer.

This is only the third time that John has shared Jesus' prayer with us. The brief prayer before raising Lazarus from the dead has a similar introduction: 'Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me"' (11:41-42). We also have the words that burst from his heart when the hour finally was upon him: 'Father, glorify your name' (12:28).

Now that the 'hour' has come (John 12:23; 13:1), Jesus again begins his prayer with the familiar 'Father' ('Abba'). In praying that his Father might glorify him, Jesus is not seeking his own glory (see 8:50; 12:43). All he wants is the glory of his Father. He knows, however, that he has been sent to reveal his Father to the world, and that he will do so especially by the love that he will show in his dying. In praying that the Father might glorify him, he is praying that in his dying the Father will reveal the intimate communion which they share (compare 13:31-32). He knows that it is this that will transform those who witness it and who believe in him. In accepting the love that Jesus is offering, they will experience a share in this divine intimacy, in 'eternal life' (see commentary on 11:17-27; also 5:26; 14:15-24). This is his Father's will and it is this that will give his Father glory (compare 13:31-32). Eternal life is the life experienced by those who 'abide in the Son and in the Father' (1John 2:24).

In what appears to be an interruption of Jesus' prayer by the narrator, eternal life is defined in terms of knowledge – the kind of knowing, however, that comes only with intimate communion. As we read in the First Letter of John: 'Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love' (1John 4:8). 'We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life' (1John 5:20).

This is the knowledge of which Jeremiah speaks: 'I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord' (Jeremiah 24:7). 'They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more' (Jeremiah 31:33-34). This is the kind of knowing for which the prophet Habakkuk prayed: 'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14). The full revelation of the Father's glory is given only by the Son: 'No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27).

The author of the First Letter of John declares: 'by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments' (1John 2:3). No one knows the Father like the Son, who can say: 'my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work' (4:34). The knowing of which John is speaking is the intimate knowing that comes only through sharing in a communion of love – a love which necessarily bears fruit.

Jesus said: 'The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me' (5:36). Now that the hour has come he can say that he has finished the work that his Father gave him to do (see also 19:28,30). He longs to be at his Father's side, 'close to the Father's heart' (1:18), 'with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed'. This is Incarnate Wisdom speaking: 'I was beside him ... I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always' (Proverbs 8:30).

³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.

What is the name that Jesus has revealed? The Book of Exodus records that God revealed his name to Moses as ‘the Lord’(‘Yahweh’, ‘I am’, Exodus 3:13-15). Isaiah reflects on the meaning of this ‘I am’ and insists on the connection between this name and God as the sole Saviour (Isaiah 43:10-13). Jesus has been identifying with ‘I am’ in his revelation of the Father. When the woman of Samaria spoke of the promised Messiah, Jesus, ‘the Saviour of the world’(4:42) responded: ‘I am’(4:26). When the disciples were terrified when he approached them walking on the sea, he proclaimed: ‘I am. Do not be afraid’(6:20). He told his disciples that they would realise that ‘I am’, ‘when you have lifted up the Son of Man’ (8:28).

Jesus reveals God’s name because he is the Son of Man who is ‘from above’, who has chosen to be incarnate that he might suffer with the oppressed, and is vindicated by God (see commentary on 1:51).

We have also seen seven ways in which Jesus reveals aspects of this name: ‘I am the bread of life’(6:35); ‘I am the light of the world’(8:12); ‘I am the gate for the sheep’ (10:7); ‘I am the good shepherd’(10:11); ‘I am the resurrection and the life’(11:25); ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’(14:6); ‘I am the true vine’(15:1).

The Name that we are to give to God in the light of Jesus’ revelation is Love (1John 4:8,16), for it is love that binds the Father to the Son in intimate communion and it is to share this love that we were created. It was to reveal this love that the Father sent his Son to us as the Son of Man.

By believing in Jesus and by accepting from him the life which he shares with his Father, his disciples give glory to his Father. It is through these close disciples that the world will come to know Jesus and so the Father. Though others refuse to accept him, these have ‘stood by me in my trials’(Luke 22:28). They have stayed with Jesus in spite of their weakness (see 16:31-32). Peter spoke for them when he said: ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’ (6:68-69). Jesus can say of them: ‘They have kept your word’. ‘His own’ (13:1) ‘know in truth that I came from you’. That this knowledge is knowledge that comes only with belief is made clear by the second half of this sentence: ‘they have believed that you sent me’(see also 16:27,30).

Jesus is praying here for his disciples that God will protect them from evil and make them holy. This is not a prayer which he can pray for ‘the world’, by which he means those who reject him, reject his word and reject those whom he is sending to carry on his mission. Jesus will continue to love the world, but what he is praying for here can only be given to those who are open to receive God’s gift. Jesus is glorified in his disciples, because their lives reveal who he is and attract others to him.

Jesus is praying as one who is ‘no longer in the world’ (17:11) and yet ‘in the world’(17:13). Nowhere is the mixing of time-frames more evident. We are listening to Jesus’ farewell speech, but we are also listening to him addressing us from the fullness of glory that he enjoys now that ‘the hour’ is complete.

^{6b}They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;

⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

^{11b}Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

God is holy because God is transcendent. God is Father because God has chosen to come close. Jesus is praying to his Father to protect his disciples ‘from the evil one’(11:15; see Matthew 6:13). He is asking his Father to do this by drawing them into the realm of his holiness, by embracing them with the same love that he has for his Son. He and his Father are one. He prays that his disciples will be one with him and one with the Father. It will be their union with Jesus in the Father that will be their protection. John’s exhortation to his community is of relevance here:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

– 1John 2:15-17

Jesus’ claim to have protected the disciples (compare 6:39; 10:27-29) raises the problem posed by Judas. He was chosen, yet he was corrupted by evil. Rather than look for psychological reasons to see why Judas chose to reject the grace offered him by Jesus, the authors of the New Testament look to the sacred Scriptures, searching for patterns that might help to make sense of what happened. In relation to the need to replace Judas, Luke quotes from Psalms 69 and 109: ‘The scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas ... “Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it”; and “Let another take his position of overseer” ’(Acts 1:16,20).

In relation to Judas’s return of the blood-money, Matthew cites Zechariah (11:12-13) in the light of Jeremiah (32:6-15): ‘Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me’(Matthew 27:9-10). In relation to Judas as betrayer, John has already cited Psalm 41:9: ‘The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me’(13:18). He seems to have this same text in mind here.

Jesus goes on to pray that his disciples will experience the fullness of the joy which he experiences because of the communion which he has with his Father. He has already said: 'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete' (15:11), and 'Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete' (16:24). Here he goes to the source of the joy which he wants for them. He does not belong to the world. He belongs to the Father and it is the intimate communion which he has with the Father that is the source of his joy.

It will be the same for his disciples. Paul writes: 'You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit' (1Thessalonians 1:6).

They will need this joy particularly because of the hatred which they will experience from the world. Jesus has already spoken to his disciples about this: 'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you' (15:18-19). His disciples do not belong to the world, because they have been given a share in Jesus' life. They have been 'begotten by God' (1:13), 'born of the Spirit' (3:6).

Finally, Jesus prays that his disciples will be 'sanctified in the truth'. To be sanctified is to be made holy. The word 'holy' is reserved in the Bible for God (see Jesus' address above: 'Holy Father', 17:11). God alone is holy. At the same time, the glory of the all-holy God 'fills the whole earth' (Isaiah 6:3) and so places and people can be made holy, not because of any inherent quality which they may be given, but because the all-holy God chooses to dwell in them. Jesus himself was filled 'without measure' (3:34) with the Holy Spirit of God (1:33; 14:26; 20:22). He is the 'Holy One of God' (6:69), 'sanctified and sent into the world' (10:36).

For the disciples to be sanctified in the truth is for them to share in the truth about God which Jesus came to reveal and which will set them free (8:32) to share in the life of love which is the very being of the Father and the Son.

¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

To be sanctified ‘in truth’ is to be drawn into the life and activity of God – what the Synoptic Gospels call ‘the kingdom of God’ (an expression used by John only in 3:3,5). To be sanctified in truth is another way of speaking of belonging to Jesus who is the truth (14:6) in the sense that he is the one who reveals the true God and in whom God really is actively redeeming the world. Something is said to be true when it is real, and so dependable. It is untrue when it is not what it appears and so cannot be relied upon. God, the Father of Jesus, is true (3:33; 8:26), because God always acts according to who God is: God is faithful to his love. It is something of which we can be sure and upon which we can rely.

Jesus reveals this true God because he is the true light (1:9), the true prophet (6:14), the true bread (6:32), the true food and drink (6:55), the true vine (15:1). His word is true (8:40,45,46; 16:7). He truly is the saviour of the world (4:42). He is full of truth, completely trustworthy (1:14; 1:17; 7:18; 14:6). His Spirit is the Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13; see 2Thessalonians 2:13). Jesus, present through his Spirit among his disciples after his death and resurrection, can be relied upon to continue to reveal the real God and to draw people into real communion with God. A true disciple is one who makes God’s word his or her home (8:31). Such a person will worship God in truth (4:23; 4:34), will come out into the light (3:21) and find freedom (8:32).

The consecration of his disciples for which Jesus prays is consecration for the priestly ministry in which all his disciples share in being sent as missionaries into the world (17:18; compare the priestly consecration of Aaron, Exodus 28:41). Jesus was ‘sanctified and sent into the world’ (10:36). Here he says: ‘I sanctify myself’ (17:19), for John is focusing on the freedom with which Jesus chooses to carry out the mission given him by his Father (see 10:17-18), the mission of ‘laying down his life for his sheep’ (10:11).

It is through reflecting on this aspect of Jesus’ mission that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as a high priest offering himself in sacrifice: ‘He entered once for all into the Holy Place ... with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption’ (Hebrews 9:12). ‘The one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father’ (Hebrews 2:11). ‘It is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (Hebrews 10:10).

The heart of Jesus reaches out to all future disciples who will come to believe in him through those to whom he has given his ‘word’ (see 17:8). He wants to share with us the fullness of communion which he has with the Father (compare 14:20). When he prays that we will be one, it is one with him and one with the Father that is foremost in his mind. The unity we share with each other is a consequence of our unity with him. Love has no goal beyond itself. Jesus simply wants to draw everyone to be part of the love he shares. However, he also knows that the more his disciples enter into divine communion, the more we will be in love with each other, and, as he said earlier: ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (13:35).

Jesus’ heart is here reaching out to the world that God loves so much (3:16). He is the Passover Lamb about to be sacrificed, the ‘lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (1:29). He is the ‘saviour of the world’ (4:42). His love, his life, his flesh, he gives ‘for the life of the world’ (6:51). He wants this world to believe. He wants everyone, in spite of the way many are rejecting him, to come to believe (17:21) and to know (17:23) that God has sent him to reveal God as a God of love. By being attracted to his disciples, people will be attracted to him and so to his Father. It will be the divine communion that binds his disciples together that will reveal to the world his love and so bring them to open their hearts to the love of God.

The unity which Jesus’ disciples will experience is the unity of branches which form one vine and draw their life from the one stock (15:5-6). Christians will belong to each other because they belong to the Father and his Son (1John 1:3). Jesus’ prayer that we be ‘sanctified in the truth’ is a prayer that, cleansed from sin through his self-offering, ‘we have fellowship with one another’ (1John 1:7). This unity has implications for every aspect of the personal and communal life of Jesus’ disciples.

Future generations will come to believe through the word of Jesus’ disciples (see Romans 10:14; Hebrews 2:3-4). The most persuasive sign, the most wonderful gift of the Spirit that will engender faith is that love which has its source not in human need, or human longing or human effort, but in the heart of God (see 1John 4:12-17). Jesus prays that his disciples will be faithful to this word so that future disciples will come to know his Father’s love and that believing ‘they may have life’ (20:31).

²⁰I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,

²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,

²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Christian unity

Because of the importance of communion in love as the key sign which reveals and so glorifies God, Paul worked hard to keep the various churches in communion, especially the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities. He writes:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

– Ephesians 4:1-6

The New Testament keeps insisting on the importance for communion of sound teaching. If what we are told about Jesus is erroneous, revelation itself will be distorted. This is stressed in John's First Letter:

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the anti-christ, the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.

– 1John 2:22-24

The unity Jesus wants for his disciples is a unity that flows from the real communion of love which he has with his Father in the Spirit. Any untruth that enters into this relationship from the world is the very contamination against which Jesus has been praying. Since belief includes the way we live, it is important that as Jesus' disciples we open our hearts to his Spirit so that he can live in us. Only in this way can we become pure 'just as he is pure' (1John 3:3). Erroneous moral teaching cannot but work against this (1Timothy 1:10; 6:3). Paul exhorts Timothy:

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

– 2Timothy 1:13-14

Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.

– 2Timothy 4:2-4

The community of Jesus' disciples, living in a communion of love, is to be in the world as 'a pillar and bulwark of the truth' (1Timothy 3:15). Those who teach error offend against this communion and distort revelation. In doing so they are acting against the saving power of the truth. Hence the appeal: 'just as it has taught you, abide in him' (1John 2:27). Since it is God's love which Jesus reveals and since the most important thing he taught us is to love one another with his love, it should be obvious that an orthodoxy that is unloving is a contradiction. It is by our loving that we will be recognised as Jesus' disciples.

This is Jesus' last will and testament. With these words he concludes his farewell speech and prayer. He began the last supper by speaking of his love (13:1) and it has been his Father's love, his own commitment to love and his command of love that have constituted the main theme of the supper discourses. It is fitting that he should end on the same note.

Jesus wants us to be with him. As he promised earlier: 'I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also' (14:3; compare 12:26). Jesus, as the Word, as the Son, 'is close to the Father's heart' (1:18). That is where he wants us to be. Let our prayer be for that purity of heart without which we are unable to see him (Matthew 5:8), and for the courage now to receive the purifying grace that alone will make us as pure as Christ (1John 3:3). John reflects further on this in his First Letter: 'Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1John 3:2).

It is such a hope that encourages Paul: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us' (Romans 8:18). 'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus knows God (see 7:29; 8:55) and has revealed God's name (see 17:6), that is to say, he has revealed the true God and how we are to relate to him. Jesus will continue to reveal his Father to us and to invite us into his own love response. He will do so, as he has already promised, through the gift of his Spirit (see 14:26; 16:13). 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Romans 5:5). Because Jesus' disciples know Jesus they know God (1John 2:14). Those who persist in rejecting Jesus do not know God.

God promised to dwell with his people. As a sign of this 'the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle' (Exodus 40:34). Jesus prays that his disciples may experience an even more intimate presence: 'May the love with which you have loved me be in them and I in them' (17:26; compare 14:15-24). We are reminded of the final words of Matthew's Gospel: 'Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.

²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'