

7. The Heart of Jesus

Prayer is our response to God's invitation. God speaks to us a Word of love and engages our longing for communion. God's Word was spoken long before the Incarnation. There never has been a time when God has not continued to speak to every person and in every culture, and there have always been those who have heard the Word and responded in saintly ways. Because of our human propensity to sin, however, the Word is often not heard or distorted, and so God chose to speak God's Word in a faultless human way in Jesus. He is God's focal Word, making sense of, giving perspective to, and perfecting all the many ways in which people of every culture have heard and responded to God's self-revelation.

Jesus' disciples looked on Jesus and opened their hearts to his love. They experienced the Spirit of love being poured into their hearts, the Spirit that unites Jesus to the God he calls 'Abba'. It is this Spirit that brought healing and meaning to them in a way that transcended any of their previous religious experiences, and they found that the same was true for those of the non-Jewish world who opened their hearts to Jesus. In the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, the Second Vatican Council reminds us:

All are called to union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, towards whom our whole life is directed (*Lumen Gentium* n.3).

Through Jesus we know God as communion in love: Father-Word-Spirit. Those who experienced Jesus came to a wonderful insight that God is One, not in the isolation of individuality, but in the unity of perfect communion in love. Of course we cannot see God or comprehend God, but this communion, this love which is God, is such that it is revealed to us in Word and Spirit. In Jesus the Word is made flesh. In Jesus the Spirit is experienced without reserve. To believe in Jesus is to share in Jesus' communion. To believe in Jesus is to be drawn into a communion of love with Jesus and with his Father and with the Spirit, their bond of love. It is this communion which brings salvation from all that holds us bound. It is our Christian belief that the risen Jesus, in eternal communion with his Father, has given us the gift of his Spirit, and, in this way, has made his home in our soul:

If you love me, my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home in you(John 15:21).

When we enter into prayer, therefore, we are responding to God's Word of love, and we are not alone. We are with Jesus. He draws us to himself and takes us to the Father:

When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself(John 12:32).

Jesus not only shows us the way to God. He *is* the way (John 14:6), for it is our communion in love with him that opens us to the Father's love and draws us into God's embrace. In Paul's words, Jesus 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. Jesus is the way because he is the perfect human expression of God's Word and it is only by responding to God's Word that we can be in communion with God:

No one can come to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

In prayer we are drawn into divine communion by being drawn into Jesus' own prayer. Jesus responded to God in intimate communion 'as the only son of a father'(John 1:14). Through communion with Jesus we share his communion with God in the Spirit. We watch Jesus as he leaves the house where he is staying and finds a secluded place where he can be alone in prayer (see Mark 1:35). We watch him weeping over the city (see Luke 19:41). We watch him on the mountain of transfiguration (see Mark 9:2) and on the mountain of agony (see Mark 14:32). We listen to his prayer in the upper room of the last supper (see John 17), and on the cross of Calvary (see Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34-46; John 19:26-30).

It is Jesus' Spirit who has been poured into our hearts, and it is this Spirit who invites us to be a holy place in which Jesus can continue his prayer. Just as the Christian life is not a matter of living like Jesus so much as allowing Jesus to live again in us, so Christian prayer is not a matter of modelling our prayer on that of Jesus so much as joining our heart to the heart of Jesus and allowing his Spirit to pray to the Father in us. Jesus did not ask us to become another vine, modelled on him. He asked us to be his branches and to remain attached to him.

Through the gift of the Spirit we are invited to pray with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me'(Galatians 2:20). This transformation is a gradual process, as Paul tells us:

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 reminds his disciples that if they remain attached to him, they will, like branches attached to a vine, bear abundant fruit (John 15:5). We said in the opening chapter that to pray is to make a choice. If we choose to pray in communion with Jesus, one of the most precious fruits of this will be that we will find ourselves sharing in Jesus' prayer. With Jesus praying in us we are sharing in Jesus' own intimacy with God. We could adapt Paul's words: 'I pray, no longer I, but Christ is praying in me.' Jesus' prayer is being answered: 'Father, may the love with which you have loved me be in them, and I in them'(John 17:26).