

It is time to say goodbye to our Upper Sixth students; officially the 2017 generation. A few of you came to Downside in that year; most joined in 2019 for the Third Form, some of it remotely because of COVID; and later, many others arrived to complete the picture of a superb year group in the Sixth Form. Perhaps it is said every year, but I can't imagine the School without you, I really can't. There are so many inspiring, happy, or funny memories involving yourselves. And, euphemistically, opportunities for greatness have been overcome too.

Parting is such sweet sorrow. But on this day of days, 28th June, we are helped both by a saint and a saviour. The Saint is Irenaeus, whose day it is; and the Saviour is Jesus Christ. Have you heard the theory that claims that we are connected to every other person by at most 5 people? For example, you are all connected to Pope Francis by only 2 people; you know me; I know an English Cardinal in Rome; and he meets with Pope Francis regularly. Well St Irenaeus can trump that: he is connected to **Jesus Christ** through only 2 other people. Jesus knew St John; St John taught St Polycarp; and St Polycarp mentored this year's Prize Day patron, St Irenaeus. For him, Jesus Christ was a friend of a friend of a friend. Although, on reflection, all of us have been invited to personal friendship with Jesus, on a one-to-one basis. Which means those who befriend us can count Jesus a friend of a friend, until they become friends with Christ themselves. And that is what Irenaeus taught, and what Jesus prayed for in our gospel today. *Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.* Being one in Christ was fundamental to Irenaeus' teaching. And Pope Francis recognised this about Irenaeus only two years ago, declaring him the Doctor of Unity. Now that's an award way beyond the scope of our prizegiving today, to be declared a Doctor of the Church. The word Doctor means teacher; to become a Doctor of the Church is a kind of honorary doctorate for saints, recognising how a saint inspired us to understand our faith better.

If our eyes inevitably become damp in the sweet sorrow of separation that today brings, remember what unites us. Remember who is at the centre of our shared life. His name is above all names. The Lord Jesus prayed: *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me.* And he said: *I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one.*

If we are honest with ourselves, we know that we don't always cover ourselves with glory, yet Jesus says God's glory has been given us. But how may we cover ourselves in glory moving forward in life? St Irenaeus knows the answer, the number one most famous saying of St

Irenaeus? *The glory of God is man, fully alive.* It bears repeating multiple times: *the glory of God is man, fully alive.* That's worth remembering every day, not only on 28th June, St Irenaeus' day.

I'd like to say that this year group, collectively and individually, has glorified God to the extent that you have lived life to the full while at Downside. Being fully alive means using your God given talents to serve others. It means learning and growing with determination. It means becoming the best person you can be. It means turning challenges and mistakes into opportunities for greatness. And being fully alive involves drawing close to Christ, the author of life. He offers us eternal life, unity in Him forever. Christ is the eternal Doctor of Unity. Many have heard His voice in Lectio Divina, helping us to meet the living Jesus more fully at Mass and in the sacraments. What could be more unifying on this last School day than beginning with Holy Mass, that offers us a foretaste of the fulness of life found beyond this one, when the final trumpet sounds during our lives on earth. *If you trust in the Lord and do good, then you will live in the land and be secure.*

In the final hymn this morning we will sing:

*To God be the glory, great things he has done;
so loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.*

To God be the glory; we will sing. If this were Stonyhurst, we might say it in Latin, like the Jesuit motto: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* – to God be the glory. Thankfully, we are Downside – so we turn to St Benedict to whom St Gregory was connected through only one friend in common; St Benedict's Holy Rule includes the following Latin words; *Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus* – that in all things, God may be glorified.

Dear Leavers, dear brothers and sisters: in the time to come may we be united by love and truth, found most fully in Christ Jesus. Our first reading began: *Fasten your attention on holiness, faith, love and peace, in union with all those who call on the Lord.* By doing so, we become fully alive; by being fully alive, we glorify God. *The glory of God is man fully alive.* To Him be glory and praise for ever. Amen.