

I'm sure that everyone here at Mass this weekend has favourite places they like to go to – places where you can simply sit quietly and be calm and content, simply by being there. These are the places where life's troubles and busyness can be put on hold. Your place might be a quiet room at home, a park bench, a favourite view, even this chapel. Perhaps it's behind the wheel of a lovely car or in a favourite chair. Wherever it is, it's that special place that brings peace and contentment for the precious moments you're able to spend there.

For me, one of my favourite places in the world is in Italy, at a retreat house called Villa Palazzola, in the hills outside Rome. We stayed there many times as students. The villa had once been a monastery, then a health farm, and for the past century has belonged to our college. It sits high above a lake – a place of stillness, prayer, and peace after the relentless noise of the city.

Inside Villa Palazzola there was one room I especially loved, particularly in winter: the old library. Its walls were lined with an eclectic mix of books – some centuries old, others left behind by guests over the years. It was a room unchanged and unspoiled, and at its heart was an open fireplace.

There's something quite comforting about a real fire. You strike a match – giving a tiny flame – and it catches the scrunched-up newspaper and kindling, and before long the logs are blazing, throwing out light and warmth. Then it settles to a steady orange glow. That room, with its quiet and its fire, became one of my happy places. I was never the one to light the fire – others enjoyed chopping wood and arranging. I'd sit back and watch. Their work involved the careful fanning of the flame, especially early on, coaxing it to grow and spread.

So when I read St Paul's words to Timothy this week – *I remind you to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you* – it brought me straight back to that room. The gift that God gives us, to you and to me, is the gift of faith. Faith means friendship with God – with the Father who loves us, with Jesus who saves us, and with the Holy Spirit who guides us every day.

We're each at a different stage in that friendship, and at times our faith will burn brightly while at other times it flickers low. Like a spark in a fireplace, the flame of faith needs fuel and care if it's to last. The disciples knew this too – that's why in the Gospel they cry out: *Lord, increase*

*our faith.* Jesus tells them their faith isn't yet the size of a mustard seed, but that even a seed that small, when nourished, has the power to grow into something great.

How do we increase our faith? How do we fan into flame the spark that God has given us?

We begin by seeking the sustenance and support of Scripture and the Sacraments. Find encouragement in St Paul's letters – as we heard today: *By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.* Read a good book from our library about faith, or explore a Catholic website. Even use AI wisely: ask your questions and let it guide you towards the wisdom of the Church rather than away from it.

Here in our School community, we grow in faith together. By actively taking part in Mass, singing or serving or reading. By getting involved with *lectio divina*, even starting our own prayer group in house. By joining the St Teresa's Community in their soup run or service projects, or being part of St Luke's Community. Or taking part in the Sodality of Our Lady, learning from Mary's courage and her quiet trust. We may grow in faith by coming along to Mass during the week, to confession after breakfast on a Saturday, or to any chaplaincy gathering – these are the places where faith is fed by friendship, service, and prayer. Above all: pray.

If your faith feels tired, rekindle your friendship with the Lord by praying in a new way, or in a new place. Find and nourish those inner spaces – your mind, heart, and soul – where the Spirit already lives. Kindle and rekindle; fan and fuel the gift of faith. And so we pray together: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.* Amen.