

Spiritually, between Ascension and Pentecost, we're in the upper room of Jerusalem with Our Lady and the disciples. We are waiting prayerfully and patiently for Pentecost, for renewal in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we are considering the deeper questions in this time of waiting patiently. Such as: what is heaven like? How do we prepare for heaven?

There is a line in the Gospel that partly answers the question. Jesus says: *This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Most people imagine eternal life as existence stretched endlessly forward. Jesus speaks about it differently. Eternal life means relationship. It means knowing God. That's different from knowing about God. The disciples already knew many things about Jesus. They had listened to His teaching and watched His miracles. Yet during these days between Ascension and Pentecost, they begin learning a deeper kind of knowledge. They were learning how to know Christ even when they could no longer see Him standing physically before them. As Jesus promises, *I will not leave you as orphans.* Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and the disciples were learning to encounter Christ and to experience his presence as he promised.

That is the beginning of Christian faith. A person may know theology, Scripture and philosophy, yet remain untouched in heart and soul. The deepest kind of knowledge comes through love. Who knows you more truly: an expert who scrutinises you from a distance, or someone who genuinely loves you? A mother often understands her child more deeply than any expert. A faithful friend perceives things no psychologist could fully explain.

Blaise Pascal once wrote that *the heart has its reasons which reason does not know.* Certain realities reach the human heart before the mind fully understands them. Beauty is like that. Grief is like that. Love is certainly like that. So too with God. The Upper Room became the place where the disciples gradually learned this truth. They waited together in prayer with Mary. They grew in trust and communion. Christianity is far more than religious information. It means communion with God. Eternal life begins when a person slowly learns to trust God, surrender to Him, and love Him.

40 years ago, a catchy chorus of a pop song: *Heaven is a place on earth.* I see there point. Heaven certainly begins on earth. Every act of forgiveness, every sacrifice quietly made for another person already participates in eternal life. Heaven becomes a way of living long before

death arrives. As the Psalm says today, *I believe I shall see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living*. Heaven already begins to break into earthly life wherever Christ teaches the heart to love. That is why Christians must learn to love their neighbour. We learn the language of heaven through ordinary acts of patience and kindness.

Who should we follow as our example? It is simple: look at Christ. When Philip says to Jesus, *show us the Father*, he replies, *whoever has seen me has seen the Father*. We reflected in Lent about how the cross reveals the glory of God. Modern culture often associates glory with success or power. Yet in the Gospel, glory appears above all as self-giving love. Christ glorifies the Father through sacrifice. The Father glorifies the Son through resurrection.

The saints learned how to love deeply within ordinary life. At Downside two saints in particular glorify the Lord, and have attained glory. Ambrose Barlow and John Roberts. But let's not dwell on them until their feast day later this year. Instead, we look within. Because Christ is glorified in us. Through every hidden act of fidelity. Through our refusal to return hatred for hatred. Through each gesture of compassion. Most holiness remains hidden from public view. Most glory is in humility. As Saint Peter says today, *the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*. Divine glory often appears quietly, resting upon ordinary lives lived with faithfulness and love. These days between Ascension and Pentecost teach the Church how to live by faith rather than sight. The disciples learned that Christ remains present even when unseen. They began learning the life of heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters, as the disciples waited together in hope until the fire of Pentecost descended upon them, the Church still waits in that same spirit of longing and prayer. And so, with the disciples in the Upper Room, with Mary, and with the saints throughout every age, we pray:

*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.*