

## Chapter One

In the Gospel, Jesus appears to Saint Thomas and invites him to touch the places of His healed wounds. Saint Thomas touches parts of Jesus's anatomy, simple gestures, straightforward. These actions then produce an eruption from the depths of Saint Thomas. Here we experience, we witness the movement from fact to meaning, from simple physical action to declaration of love, of adoration, of faith. Faith in God is inseparable from meaning, from love, from total adoration. Humans are made for this.

When we focus on a certain area of expertise, men and women, with our remarkable gift of intelligent enquiry and free will, can apply ourselves with great dedication. We can become full of knowledge in so many forms: physical, artistic, intellectual, emotional. But our intellect and will are above what is of this world. They are not material, they do not and cannot emerge from what are essentially unconscious atoms or molecules. We often employ our reason and will without any awareness or gratitude in everyday living. And, as such, reason and will can become clogged up, like pharaoh's charioteer's wheels in the mud of the Red Sea, by our tasks and work, which are rooted in this earth. But in themselves, reason and will are spiritual, separate from the affairs of the material world.

We humans are expressly created with intellect and will to know what is true, and to love what is good. That is what a human person is. Our intellect is ordered to sublime truth, and our will to the good, to beauty. However, our longing to know and love can never be truly satisfied by anything in this world, in this universe. Nothing in this world is ever truly enough. In short we are restless until we come to know what is absolutely true and absolutely good.

And so we then admit to ourselves that if there were such a reality where we could find infinite wisdom and unchanging, living truth; where are wills, recognising such goodness, such beauty, could then cleave in love, in self-giving, sacrificial love, agape, we, each of us, would be truly happy, truly at peace. We would have come home.

But there is such a reality. That reality has come, He has a name, the name before Whom every knee shall bow. The reading from Revelation, by Saint John, reveals the sublime majesty, and authority with which Jesus commands the humble Saint John. The reading from Acts reveals how the grace of Jesus, at work in Saint Peter and his fellow Apostles, leads others to experience, in awe, Jesus's own wisdom and glorious goodness. And Saint Thomas's heart and mind finally renounce their self-centredness and reach out to confess that Jesus is everything. His reason and his will have found their loving Creator: perfect truth, perfect goodness. He exclaims in joy for all. He has found the door to peace, to fulfilment.

In Jesus Christ we discover the fulfilment of, at least, 300 Old Testament prophecies. His life and miracles led all the Apostles and others to follow Him, even unto death, for He is Lord, above, before, and beyond all creation. His knowing them, and us; and His teaching feeds our reason with the highest truth. Christ's teaching is so exalted, it enables our hearts to grow and know healing in His Spirit. His divine mercy to leave Heaven, assume human nature, and to offer Himself as the eternal sacrifice for all our sin is our highest good, which heals our wills. On Divine Mercy Sunday we are offered the glory of human life, from the risen Jesus. Are we ready to exclaim, "my Lord and my God," and mean it?

## Chapter Two

The Cardinals in Rome are praying to and listening to the Holy Spirit as they prepare to elect the successor to Saint Peter, thus it is apt that the first reading and Gospel are strongly focused on Saint Peter.

Saint Peter grew in awareness that by being close to Jesus his sins would always surface. Gradually he learnt not to run from this, for Jesus would give him healing grace to grow in courage and holiness, as Saint Peter's soul never truly wanted to be far from Jesus. Do we always want to be near Jesus? Are we prepared to see our sins in Jesus's purifying glory?

Before we consider the large haul of fish in our Gospel at the end of Jesus's ministry on earth, let us turn to Saint Luke's account of a large haul of fish at the beginning of Jesus's ministry, when Jesus is calling the disciples. There, after Jesus instructed Simon Peter to put his nets on the other side of the boat, Simon Peter was reluctant to act on Jesus's advice, saying, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Jesus then provides a great miracle and Simon Peter falls to his knees declaring his sinfulness. Jesus's presence reveals to Simon Peter that he needs to repent and grow in faith in Jesus.

In our Gospel today, Saint Peter has, by now, denied Jesus three times, and this weighs heavily on Saint Peter. As before, Jesus appears after a difficult night of fishing. The fishermen are tired. And the resurrected Jesus has already appeared to the disciples, yet it appears to be business as usual for them: back to the boats and fishing. This teaches us how the disciples are susceptible to despondency, to giving up; how will the Resurrection of Jesus change their lives? Can we relate to their feelings? This time though, as the fish begin to fill the bursting

nets, Saint Peter does not say anything, but flings on a garment and hurls himself into the sea. It is as if his heart is ready to break if he does not clamber up to Jesus and tell how he loves Him. He must be in Jesus's presence.

A quick detour to Genesis is necessary. Remember how Adam and Eve, after their sin, realising that they were naked, covered parts of their bodies in shame; well, here Saint Peter, as he prepares to come to Jesus, covers his body. An acknowledgment that he, like Adam and Eve, cannot come into the splendour and glory of the Lord naked, for he is a man of shame.

Now Jesus's presence on this beach fills the disciples with wonder and awe, love is growing in their hearts. And now Jesus begins the healing of Saint Peter's three denials. It all hinges on the Greek: Jesus's word for love to Saint Peter is about sacrifice, unconditional love; and Saint Peter's responding word for love is only at the level of brotherly love. But Jesus is sowing seeds patiently, prising open the impulsive but frightened heart of Saint Peter. Jesus prophesies, though, that the Prince of the Apostles will, in turn, give his life for Him and the Gospel in deepest love.

And in the first reading, Saint Peter - after the purifying fire of is willing to be led by Jesus regardless of any personal cost. The love by which Jesus commanded Saint Peter to love his sheep, at the beach breakfast, has now flourished in the Apostle's heart. Coming close to Jesus, becoming Christ like, will make us aware of our sinfulness, for then He may truly heal us and recreate us, ready to be sent on mission. Let us, like Saint Peter, learn to come to Jesus, open, and not flee from His saving love.

## Chapter Three

How wonderful that Good Shepherd Sunday falls during Easter, for Easter is the sacred time when we laud, yet more gloriously, the true Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who comes to carry His faithful flock to eternal pastures, to springs of eternal water, wiping away every tear.

Further, how fitting it is that our beloved children are making their First Holy Communion on this Sunday, with their families, for the Good Shepherd is giving Himself in His Spirit and in divine Food. May He find us ready to be gathered by Him. Being shepherded by Jesus must involve every part of us.

Let us learn, first, though, from the Holy Bible about shepherds who fail in their duty, notably in the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah strongly warns shepherds who have weakened the faith of their flock and scattered the sheep. He also promises a time when the Lord Himself will come to bring the sheep back to the fold, and that He will appoint shepherds, after His Own Heart.

Ezekiel delves into reasons why the sheep have been scattered. The shepherds have put their own comfort first; not caring truly for the health and salvation of their flocks. And in the words of the Lord, Ezekiel declares, "The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought."

From these words we learn what a shepherd must do. But we must remember that we humans are not sheep: sheep, without intelligence, must be absolutely directed where they are to go; however, each and every one of us, as persons, has been created to know, to love, and to follow God, freely. Last Sunday, Jesus

commanded Saint Peter to follow Him, but Jesus would never force Saint Peter. No, Jesus implores Saint Peter to know the truth of the Resurrection, and to embrace Jesus's perfect love for him and then to follow Him, to choose Him. The 10 Commandments command us to go to Mass every Sunday, but we are still free to reject God's healing Commandments, as some do. Jesus in His miracles, in fulfilling the prophecies, makes clear exactly Who He is. He is the Good Shepherd, who has come, that we human sheep may knowingly follow Him with hearts being changed by His divine love from His Heavenly Throne with the Father.

The Good Shepherd has come with teaching and miracles that we may understand Who divine love is and to follow in His love. Divine Love, is called Jesus, He has come to shatter all that leads us astray; to destroy all that causes nature to die for ever. He has come, that each of us, in His Holy Spirit, may begin to wake from slavery to created things, and see afresh and follow in ways which are not fleeting, not self-centered, but reach out to follow unchanging love, in wonder. This divine Love, Jesus, the world cannot give. The Good Shepherd invites us to follow, freely.

No one can ever measure the depth and breadth of Christ. But by following His living love, by understanding His Commandments, by receiving Him in Holy Communion, with hearts and minds radiantly open to repentance, we are led into a life which is always a 'coming to the Kingdom', for Jesus and the Father are one. May this sacred time of Holy Communion teach us to know, love, and follow the Good Shepherd. Jesus comes to shepherd us to Heaven, He is our Saviour.

## Chapter Four

Last week, Good Shepherd Sunday, we saw how Jesus comes to shepherd us to Heaven. Saint John, in Revelation, described the Heavenly Throne with the Father and the Son in glory, and the Son was the Lamb, who had been slain for our sins and in Whose Precious Holy Blood we are washed clean. So Jesus is our Good Shepherd most fully through His dying for our sins and then gloriously rising to bring us home.

This Sunday we continue to explore how Jesus shepherds us home. A central word for this Sunday is glory. A Christian is called to glory. Saint Paul to the Corinthians writes, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

In the Psalm today we sing, "They shall speak of the glory of your reign, and the glorious splendour of your reign." Saint John in the reading from Revelation describes the glory of the new heaven and the new earth, and the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. Jesus, Himself, in the Gospel declares, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him." Being a Christian demands that we take seriously the glory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, in referring to Himself as the Son of Man, leads us to the Prophet Daniel, there we read, "and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, 1. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him".

And look at some of our beloved children this Sunday, they are here this morning to make their First Holy Communion and they are dressed appropriately in glorious fashion. The reasons are deep: white for the Heavenly purity of Christ and other fine fabrics and colours to reflect the glory of heaven. For they

know that Jesus, in Holy Communion, is the divine goodness, the holiness by which we can become glorious. Christians over the centuries have given their lives to be fed by Jesus in Holy Communion, they have given all for the glory of Jesus Christ. Are we prepared to live for the glory of Jesus Christ?

Our children are actually dressed as if they are going to a wedding. Their wedding. In Revelation, Saint John describes the holy city, new Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And our Altar is where the faithful are invited to dine at the Heavenly Wedding Banquet, "Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb." A foretaste of glory.

And we are offered this glory because of Jesus. In His divine love, He suffered and died for our sins and has washed us clean in His Precious Blood. And so Paul and Barnaba teach the new Christian communities that, "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." In Revelation we heard, "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more." We see, as in so many passages in the Holy Bible, that the newness, the pure glory which Jesus brings is through battling with darkness, with sin. So when we come forward to receive Holy Communion, we declare, too, that we are going to wholly reject sin and strive to follow in the Lord's goodness, for His glory is worth everything. May we, every time we present ourselves to receive Holy Communion, ponder on what Jesus has done for us, and so strive to live lives which are pure, are driven by the wonder and excellence of Jesus, that we, too, one day, may shine with His glory.

## **Chapter Five**

During the past two weeks, we have reflected on how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shepherds us home to Heaven, and we continue with this theme today. We have been celebrating, too, with our children, who have received First Holy Communion with their families in the heart of the parish. Jesus truly comes to shepherd the whole flock, the older and younger amongst us.

Foundational to all life and, indeed, the future of creation, is how Jesus shepherds. The word shepherd is deceptively pastoral and pictorial: perhaps we think of the Yorkshire Dales and bleating lambs. But this is not adequate. Think of bleak hillsides, attacking wolves under the cover of darkness, and of threats from bandits and thieves. So the metaphor of the Good Shepherd also points to Jesus willingly suffering and dying to stop anything that can lead us astray. Indeed, Jesus truly shepherds us by delivering our mortal bodies from sin and final death, and from the clutches of the devil. In Jesus we can be freed from every kind of slavery, by truly turning to the Shepherd.

Last week, Saints Paul and Barnabas were strengthening the souls of the Christians by announcing that the path to the kingdom of God will involve tribulation. And in Revelation, last week, Saint John describes how in the heavenly new Jerusalem, all tears will be wiped away. These sacred passages teach that the way to Heaven, the way the Good Shepherd opens, is through the cross, and that each of us is to engage in spiritual battle with Christ our Saviour, Light, and Shepherd. We are to pick up our cross, removing all that drags us down, by battling with Jesus's necessary purity and love.

The spiritual battle can only be truly fought with an awareness of Jesus's living victory. It stands to reason that if we, and our young people, become devoted to distractions, to phones and

headphones, to filling our hearts and minds with fundamentally self-centred occupations and fears, we will, and they will, grow blind and dulled to the joy of our utter need of God, to the actual light which we need to from Heaven. God is never boring, but we slowly kill our attentiveness by placing ourselves at the centre. God gives unceasingly; Jesus brings Heaven to human hearts and minds; the Commandments are a gift, a seal of radiant love.

In the Gospel, when Jesus says, "If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I," He is teaching His disciples to see far beyond this world. "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Jesus, in taking glorified humanity back to the Father, now intercedes for all humanity in the presence of the Father; and, for the faithful, He sends the Holy Spirit to teach and give His Heavenly peace. Father and Son are the Temple; their light illumines all. Here is divine peace, always present to shepherd the humble.

This guidance of the Holy Spirit is also present in His Church. The first reading teaches how Jesus, by returning to the Father in glory, sends His Holy Spirit to guide His Church, to guide His faithful shepherds in teaching eternal truth. And this shepherding continues today with Pope Leo XIV, as the Vicar of Christ. Yes, we are to pick our cross daily; we are to engage in a spiritual battle for holiness and virtue in Christ, and, too, we are given Heavenly light, divine love, and teachings which shepherd the faithful to ultimate eternal flourishing. Let us rejoice and cherish, anew, the wonderful ways in which Jesus shepherds us in this life, which always lead to the next.

## Chapter Six

The readings for the Vigil Mass of Pentecost are extraordinary on at least one level: the actual day of Pentecost, starting in the Upper Room, is not mentioned in any of the readings. Instead, we are taught how Jesus wishes to see the power of the Holy Spirit take root in the hearts of believers. Jesus Christ, and His Apostle, Saint Paul, have high expectations for our hearts. Water, a sign of the Holy Spirit, is envisaged as flowing from our hearts. The question is whether we are humble in our longing to become wholly conformed to Jesus Christ, to welcome and serve His Holy Spirit alive and flowing from our hearts?

In describing how we are to be, Jesus refers to Scripture and He says, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." That is our hearts He is referring to. This line is an amalgamation of at least three passages from Scripture. One is from Numbers: Moses and Aaron have displeased the Lord. They doubted the Lord, they did not believe in Him out of their hearts, and did not uphold the holiness of the Lord to the people. However, despite this, the Lord caused abundant miraculous waters to flow from a rock, after Moses struck it, and it quenched the thirst of the congregation, and their livestock.

This passage, whilst referring to an historic occasion, though, has a deeper meaning. In the verses before, cleansing rituals with water are taught as necessary to the everyday and spiritual life in the Israelite family. Water is a sign of spiritual cleansing. Jesus, Himself, speaks of the full power of spiritual water: at the well with the Samaritan woman, we read, "Jesus said to her, [] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The Spirit dwelling within us is truly to flow forth like water.

Two other important readings regarding life-giving water are found in Ezekiel and Zechariah. Here the references point to the end of time, and the water flowing from the Temple and Jerusalem will bring Heavenly life. In this water will be the power of the Holy Spirit bringing new life. The psalm chosen for this Mass sings, "You send forth your spirit, and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth".

Jesus and Saint Paul in Romans are as clear as pure water: our hearts need to be renewed by the Spirit, with spiritual Water, to be united with the risen and glorious Lord Jesus. And so Jesus cries out, that the believer, the man or woman who humbly comes to the wells of salvation, "out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Jesus is teaching that the Holy Spirit will truly be present. And Saint Paul proclaims that, "he" (which refers to us), "he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Again, the Spirit is to dwell within us and lead us. We are to take along by the flowing wisdom and glory of the Spirit cascading from our hearts.

Unlike the men and women of Babel, who wanted to make their own way to Heaven, as if the Lord had no say in the matter, true believers in God know that the only way to eternal life is unthinkable, is impossible without the Holy Spirit. Spiritual renewal is vital, it must take place in our hearts and minds, so that from them, like water, the light, glory, and victory of Jesus will stream forth.

## Chapter Seven

Today the Church specifically adores and glorifies the Holy Spirit. The Spirit renews all creation inseparably from Jesus's victory over sin and death, for the glory of the Father.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that He and His Father, will send the Holy Spirit to be with us for ever. This "for ever" teaches much: to enter the "for ever" of Heaven, we must be filled with and held in eternal glory by the Holy Spirit, sent by Father and Son. The Psalm for today proclaims the divine power of the Holy Spirit, "You take away their breath, they die, returning to the dust from which they came. You send forth the spirit, and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth". It is only in the sent Holy Spirit that creation can receive together the gift of life eternal.

In the weeks leading up to the Ascension we read from Saint John's book of Revelation. Saint John's visions included a new earth and a new heaven, and the holy city of Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God. It is in the breathing out of the Holy Spirit by Jesus after His Victorious Resurrection that all creation, the entire cosmos, can receive its eternal glory. In Saint John's Gospel we read, 'Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." The Spirit is Jesus's forgiving power for all. Here is the key to creation's everlasting glory and coming together as a family.

The power of Jesus's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the new order for all creation: it is His eternal victory over all sin, all darkness. Jesus has shattered the wages of sin: death. Again the Psalm, "You send forth your spirit, and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." And this power of the Holy Spirit, in the reading from Acts, is at work in faithful human hearts and minds with intelligibility, with powers of counsel and wisdom. This great historical reading is to be read in conjunction with the first reading from Genesis at the Vigil Mass. There, the peoples of the world spoke one language and came together to build a tower, the Tower of Babel, to scale the heights of heaven in their pride. The Lord put an end to these self-centered ways by confusing their language. And here on the Day of Pentecost, in the power of the Holy Spirit, peoples of different nations and tongues have come together again, but are now able to understand each other in the power of the Lord's Spirit. The Spirit, who brings Jesus, alone builds the way to Heaven, and we are to become living stones.

Saint Paul, to the Romans, gives clear teaching on how it is the Holy Spirit, who in bringing the power of Jesus Christ's Resurrection to the faithful, is able to confer the eternal Spirit into our mortal bodies. Saint Paul teaches that if we are to truly live as children of God, to truly inherit the title of being adopted sons and daughters of God, then we must look to the Spirit, to Jesus's gift. Too, Saint Paul stirs us to faithful discipleship in Jesus. Jesus fought the powers of evil and sin in His Sacred Heart and in His Holy Body, that we, called to be children of the Spirit, children of Pentecost, might do the same, to inherit His promises. The Holy Spirit invites us, with the risen Jesus by our side, to take steps of spiritual goodness and courage, to

become Christ-like. Yes, the Holy Spirit is truly the Lord, the giver of divine life for all.

## Chapter Eight

Last week, Pentecost, we rejoiced in and adored the Holy Spirit. It was the end of Easter. During Lent and Easter there is a profound emphasis on the Son in relation to His Father, the Son's coming to save us in divine love, and then, the sending of the Holy Spirit, heavenly fire, bringing us Jesus's victory, imparting into our souls, and into the Church, the eternal love between Father and Son. And so, rightly, the Church dedicates a particular Sunday to God, to the Most Holy Trinity.

In Year C, the Church gives us readings which strongly emphasise Jesus as the Word of truth and the Wisdom of God.

In the opening prayer Jesus is referred to as the Word of truth sent into the world. In Proverbs we learn that Wisdom is before the beginning of the earth, before the depths were brought forth. But in creation His presence is everywhere, like a master workman. In the Psalm we see how the believer is filled with wonder at creation; he or she is pondering the ordering of the cosmos. The human person, a rational creature, is made for truth, created to understand. In the Gospel, Jesus refers to the Spirit of truth coming, and this Spirit will guide us into all the truth.

Truth has different meanings. There are truths present in the material world. Humanity, with our intellectual faculties, is able to discover truths inherent in creation. The work of cellular and molecular empirical scientists, in these days, has illuminated the irreducible complexity of cells and proteins, of DNA,

revealing, more than ever, how species are truly unique and have been specifically designed by God to be this or that.

But we are also to delight in truths. The reading from Proverbs contains that exquisite line where Wisdom says, "and I was his daily delight". This refers to the joy between Father and Son in the glory of Their creation. There is love here. Truths and ordering in creation are inseparable from divine love, from delight. So the human search for truth must include the heart. Biblical writers teach that the heart is the centre of man for it is here that the cerebral intellect and the bodily passions meet. It is from the heart that we need to discover and delight in the truths of life.

And so we come to Truth Himself. The human heart, as the door to our souls, is wounded. Men's and women's quest for knowledge, for material truth, can be heartless, and also we can become disordered with passions, with bodily desires, again heartless. We are all wounded; though the Christian has found the answer.

Jesus is Absolute Truth: He is eternal Wisdom, the Word for all creation and He is eternal love. He comes as Lord, Teacher, and Lover of who we are to be. He brings healing, actual redemption to our minds and bodies now and for Heaven. As Absolute Truth He is our meaning, our goal; the healing of our intellect and passions flow from His Risen Sacred Heart.

And we receive this new life from His Spirit, as Saint Paul writes, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The Person of Jesus Christ: Word of truth, Wisdom of creation, is also Beloved of the Father, Love incarnate. Through His atoning sacrifice for us, He sends us the Spirit Who brings us to His life with the Father. The Trinity is Loving Communion, the Trinity is

Wisdom and Truth, and we are invited to enter Their life. This must be the foundation of all we are and do.

## **Chapter Nine**

As Catholics we believe that Holy Communion is the moment when we receive He Who suffered, died and rose in of eternal love for us. At Holy Communion we receive the Person, whom we need to know and love. Scripture gives us living threads, which, when woven together in our minds and hearts by the Spirit, begin the creation of the necessary wedding garment through which we can know and love Jesus.

Loving others happens because we know them and trust them. True openness is needed. Sacred Scripture, God's love letter to His children, leads us to know Jesus, we want to receive Him. Absolute openness is needed here.

The Entrance Antiphon, from Psalm 81, sings of how the Lord fed His people with finest wheat and with honey from the rock, and they were satisfied. The Gospel, too, tells us that the five thousand people were satisfied with loaves and fish. This being satisfied, though, points to something deeper.

In Psalm 81 the Lord reminds His people how He had saved them from all their distress, and yet they had turned away, their hearts and minds were closed. But the end of Psalm 81 points to a greater time, when the finest wheat will be given; and when not water but honey, which in the Bible signifies abundance, spiritual understanding, and the sweetness of the Lord's words will flow from the Rock. The Rock being Jesus, the new and eternal Temple. These promises are all fulfilled at Communion, for Jesus is the absolute Finest Wheat and Heavenly Honey.

In the Scriptures we learn of Melchizedek, King of Salem, and the first to be mentioned as "priest" in the Bible. He also offers bread and wine to the Lord. The name Melchizedek means the 'just king'; Salem is an early name for the holy city Jerusalem; and bread and wine continued to have significance in sacrifices; indeed, by the time of Jesus, they were offered every week in the Temple.

Jesus is the fulfilment of all to which Melchizedek points: by dying for our sins, out of His eternal divine love, and rising from the dead, He restores absolute justice and peace between man and God, and so, properly, He is the Just King and the Eternal King of Jerusalem; and of the bread and wine, these would become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of God the Son. In Saint John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Jesus is the finest wheat fallen to the ground that, in His Resurrection, all creation might bear much fruit. Are we seeing how much Jesus loves us, are we knowing Him?

The ancient priesthood of Melchizedek is also mysterious. In the Psalm, King David is prophesying the Lord Who will come with an eternal priesthood, like Melchizedek. Jesus is this High Priest, for He offers the perfect sacrifice for all sin: Himself. Was ever there love so perfect? No. And He gave His Church the command to perpetuate this memorial of His Passion, through bread and wine being transformed into His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, by the Spirit, at the Last Supper.

We are learning Who Jesus is, we are learning to be actually open to the eternal love He offers, which saves us. As you approach The Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus at Holy

Communion, open your entire lives, like a flower reaching up to the sun, to Jesus. He is the Lord.

## Chapter Ten

To celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation on the Solemnity of The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Year C brings a particular emphasis on Jesus as the Shepherd.

The image of the Sacred Heart teaches much. Hearts are an integral part of any person. In Jeremiah the Lord declares, "and I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." So we see here, though, that the heart is directly bonded to the mind. The heart perfects and completes what the mind cannot accomplish by itself, and vice versa. Later in Jeremiah we read, "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Again we see the heart and mind bound together. But note: the heart is first, and whereas the Lord will test the mind, which sounds somewhat schoolish, He is looking for something in the heart, He will search the heart.

The Lord is looking for actual living, true, and burning love in our hearts. The Sacred Heart image portrays Jesus's Heart as deep blood red and on fire. How we remember Jesus's words in Saint Luke's Gospel, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it was already kindled!" And our Lord's Sacred Heart is pierced and bleeding, surrounded by the crown of thorns, and surmounted by a wooden cross. But these man-made instruments do not limit or thwart the fire of God's love, no, in fact they reveal the absolute victory and power of God's love

when confronting our sin. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the source of God's shepherding and purifying love offered to all people, extended to all creation. For from this Heart of infinite mercy, pierced for us, rays of glory, of holy fire radiate outwards, to carry us home. They are offered to each of us and given through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans confirms this: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." At Confirmation we receive God's love, by the Holy Spirit, in a perfecting way. It strengthens and completes what we receive in Baptism, to live outwardly a life, consciously willing to be conformed to Jesus Christ. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are pivotal. Here we see specifically how heart and mind are inseparable.

The Spirits of Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge are rooted in the mind. Yet, they require the fire of divine love to become kind. The Spirits of Counsel and Fortitude call upon the presence of the Lord's love in our hearts that we may explain what is right and good with courage and humility - the log must be removed from our own eyes first. The Spirit of Piety involves both heart and mind for we are to take conscious delight in, to love the ways in which we worship and pray. And fundamental to receiving these six Spirits is the last, the Fear of the Lord. This demands a consciously open heart and mind: it is awe in front of the Lord. The awareness that the Lord is eternal and yet with us. Saint Paul puts it so.

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ." Far yet near.

The passage from Isaiah in which we discover the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit continues with a description of Him Who lives these Gifts with glory, born of the House of David. These

gifts pour forth perfectly from Jesus Christ, from His Most Sacred Heart and from Him Who is also the Logos, the Word made flesh. The Shepherd of our hearts and minds has risen for each of us, he has found us. Let us stray not from His Most Sacred heart and His most perfect mind.

## **Chapter Eleven**

Jesus, when He was alive with His Apostles, when He was with Saint Mary Magdalen, He inspired them in so many ways. Think of the healings - the blind could see, the lame could walk, the mute could speak; also His miracles over nature he changed water into wine, calmed the storm, walked on water; also, He brought those who had died back to life. These miracles are clear. People were astonished that He could do these things with such ease, with such command, indeed, many thought, "could this be the One Whom the Scriptures promise?" "Could this be the Son of Man from the

Prophet Daniel?"

But Jesus offered more than miracles. He could read into persons' hearts and minds. He knew how easily led astray each of us can become; how distracted we choose to be; how we willingly let our hearts be captured by passing things, and so turn away from the most important aspect of life: God's call to each of us. For when Jesus gave His miracles they were always there to bring the sinner, bring the needy person to an actual relationship with God.

So Jesus's miracles are there to change how we understand the gift of life: His miracles are offered to make us wake up and

know that God is real, and that God loves each of us so much that He would come and do these wonderful things for us,

But with God, of course, it gets even better. For Jesus's greatest miracle took about three days to accomplish. The greatest miracle in the history of the entire universe is the Passion - Jesus suffering upon the Cross out of love for each of us, His Death, and His Resurrection. This new, resurrected Jesus shows how God's love can make all things utterly new. The Resurrection of Jesus is divine love's victory over everything.

The Gospel today speaks of a shepherd who is willing to leave 99 sheep solely to find one stray sheep. No human shepherd would do this. Do we see how the love of God is for His children? God's love for us is eternal. Jesus came, with His Sacred Heart, burning and crowned with thorns out of love for us, that we might, in His Spirit, turn absolutely away from sin, from doing wrong, absolutely turn away from being captured by distractions, that we might ignore the Lord no more.

And Saint Paul sings of how we are to open ourselves to this love, to Jesus's Sacred Heart for, as he writes, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." So we are not only to look at images of Jesus's Sacred Heart; no, we are called to realise that our own hearts have been made to receive Jesus's beams of love being sent from His Most Sacred heart; we are called to have hearts transformed even into a heart like His. Yes, the Sacred Heart is to be our guide, our lamp burning brightly at all times.

All of Jesus's miracles were offered by Him to us, personally, that we might step aside from lives which are mainly focused on ourselves, really occupied with our own desires and fears, and discover the light, the fire, the burning love of Jesus, radiating from His Sacred Heart. It is in this purifying light, this

burning eternal love that every aspect of our lives today can find its true and right focus. Our hearts and minds will be lifted up, being made ready for the eternal life, the life with Jesus in the Trinity, and with the Saints in Heaven. May we open our hearts to the overflowing measure of grace which cascades from the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has come to save us.

## **Chapter Twelve**

The Collect prayer for the Vigil Mass speaks of Saints Peter and Paul as being foundational in establishing the heavenly office of the Church. Foundations never cease to support. It will profit us, then, to look at how these divinely appointed Apostles shaped and continue to shape the Church which the Son of God, Jesus Christ, founded. Who they became was, absolutely, a response to Jesus Christ's grace, which He lavished upon them.

In Acts, Saints Peter and John are together. Remember that it was these two, after Saint Mary Magdalen had announced to them that the stone in front of the tomb had been taken away, who hastened together to the empty tomb. Too, with Saint James, they were at the Transfiguration and at the Garden of Gethsemane. Often they would have experienced Jesus gazing penetratively into the depths of their being.

Our reading retells the meeting between the Apostles and a lame man: "seeing Peter and John about to go into the Temple,

he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them". This looking, this gazing into the eyes of the Apostles is important. In Saint Mark we read, "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Further, when Peter had denied Jesus three times, we read in Saint Luke, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly." And Saint Paul, when the glory of the risen Lord shone on Saul at his conversion, Saint Paul was blinded for three days.

Saints Peter and John, now after Pentecost, are full of the Spirit of Jesus, who rose from the dead, and they know, in a moment of grace, that Jesus's gaze will flow through them into this lame man's heart and that he will accept the glory of the Lord, who died for our sins, and walk. Regarding Saint Paul in Acts we read, "And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking." The compassion and healing power of the Lord dwelt within these Apostles, and shone from their very eyes.

These aspects reveal the heavenly foundations of the Church.

Also, with Saints Peter and Paul we have the fruitful interplay between authority and theological reflection. Saint Peter, throughout Scripture, is the first among equals. And the keys he's given refer to Isaiah, where the king's prime minister will pass on the keys of his office to his successor. Jesus being the King, and Saint Peter, and his successors, His Prime Minister.

Saint Paul, who was called independently by the risen Jesus Christ to be an Apostle, spends three years reflecting on, meditating upon the mystery of Jesus Christ, as the fulfilment of the Jewish Faith. And then he goes to visit Saint Peter, the leader of the Apostles and of Christ's Church, for true theological reflection must always remain faithful and loyal to the authority and leadership entrusted by the Son of God to Saint Peter and his successors.

Saints Peter and Paul strove to give everything for Jesus, after His mercy looked into their souls. Their teaching and authority endure to this day, for Jesus commanded it so. May we discover anew, when their words and prayers look into our hearts, how we can better serve Jesus Christ and His Church.

## Chapter Thirteen

Christianity is community. We are called to worship and serve as part of a parish family, which itself is part of the whole Church, through all time. We exist for each other in spiritual and physical bonds.

I say this because God the Lord is eternal Community: three eternal divine Persons. God cannot be considered rightly unless we understand that God is eternal Community, God is sublime relationship. Nothing can ever touch or lessen Their joy and nobility.

To teach us rightly Who God is, the eternal Son, born of the Virgin Mary, the perfect Son of Man, enters God's creation. The utter purpose of the Incarnation, God becoming flesh, the Son of Man, is to save. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, for God did not send his Son into the world to

condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." This quotation from Saint John's Gospel teaches that God loves and that God wills utterly to bring a renewed creation, once truly wounded by sin, into God's Life, into Their Community.

Thus, inherent in every human person is the capacity for this indestructible Heavenly joy. And so we would rightly expect that those Apostles, faithful to their commission from the Lord, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, would embody the life, teachings and glory of Jesus in a real and wonderful manner.

Saints Peter and Paul, as the Collect prays, afford us noble and holy joy this day. Why are they noble? The word noble is rooted in describing someone who is high-born. Here that nobility is not an earthly line, but one, rather, which flows from radiant Goodness: The Lord Jesus. Both Peter and Paul experienced moments when they were far from the purity of the Lord: Peter denying Jesus three times when Jesus's hour had come to save; and Paul in his systematic and ruthless aim to have Christians killed. Both were then astonished by the utter goodness of the Lord, that even when they were so far away, He came to lead them into the true joy of right religion.

The Gospel reading is foundational for the Catholic Church, for the Church that Jesus Christ founded. Here Jesus gives to Saint Peter sacred keys, which in Biblical meaning denote one who is made something like a prime minister, whose role will continue through his successors. Jesus singles out Saint Peter for this service because Saint Peter, even though he will turn away from Jesus before the Crucifixion, is so open to discovering true joy from Heaven, as is evident in his declaration that Jesus is God. The nobility of being a Christian is taking root in his soul. The reading from Acts further reveals

how the Lord is preparing Saint Peter to truly know and live the unstoppable joy and dignity which flows from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit,

Saint Paul, too, in his letter to Timothy, is eager to embrace fully the joy of eternal glory and the crown of righteousness.

Having met the risen glorious Lord, having discovered the full meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures in Jesus, Saint Paul was on fire to preach the saving grace offered to all who come to the Saviour, who come to the Truth, God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

Saints Peter and Paul are tremendous in their self-gift to Jesus Christ, and in their dedication to bring the Faith to all the world. These men longed to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Are we open to receiving a measure of their joy and nobility?

## Chapter Fourteen

The seventy-two followers of Jesus return full of amazement at the power which Jesus has shared with them. But Jesus then says, in effect, enough focus on this power, it is Heaven which should be the goal of your rejoicing. Jesus is weaning His disciples off worldly power and celebrity to purify their intentions. The purifying of our hearts and minds for Heaven is the foundational quest for all our lives.

Central to all the readings this Sunday is the goal of Heaven. Last Sunday the Church rejoiced in two foundational Saints, Peter and Paul; in absolute truth we can say that for these two men Heaven was their overriding goal, their longing. They had tasted many of the fruits of life - bitter and sweet - but greatest, the most important was their purification to grasp the limitless

Truth of Jesus Christ, ever the Lord. Saint Paul says that in the victory of the Cross alone all this passing world's lure and challenge takes its actual secondary place.

The Scriptures, inspired texts, always possess an absolute focus on God. The Prophets, the Apostles, their words are acutely turned towards Heaven, to the absolute Lord. The words of Scripture are alarming, for they hold us to account, asking us to look at how we are choosing to live. We read there of final judgement and punishment. Indeed, the Gospel witnesses to Jesus prophesying terrible judgement upon those towns who reject Heaven, who reject the Kingdom of God, for God comes with absolute rule. We can baulk at this ultimate judgement; however, innate to each one of us are the seeds which call us to know what is right, what is wrong, for we are made in the image and likeness of God.

The other hand of Scripture is total tenderness, unstoppable love, even when humans have done terrible things. Consider, even though Cain took the life of his brother Abel, and lied to God, yet the Lord gave Him protection. The Prophet Hosea's wife, who is unfaithful, is a sign of the infidelity of Israel, yet the Lord remains ever faithful to her. The reading from Isaiah today speaks of the Lord, like a mother, nursing, feeding, making truly glorious the holy city of Jerusalem in the kingdom of Heaven. And all nations are invited to flourish in the waters of life.

We see in these readings final true judgement and complete healing love. How can these be reconciled? How can God act with utter justice and also extend redemption to what has freely turned away from Heaven? The happy and joyful answer can only lie in One Who is from Heaven; Who is Justice, is Judgment; and Who comes in mercy by offering Himself up as

the sacrificial Victim. Jesus gives Himself over to sinners for from our chaos He alone will bring utter righteousness and authority, loving all to the end. Thus Jesus is the eternal and living reconciliation between God and all creation. Jesus, in the presence of the Father, in the bond of the Holy Spirit, is our justification and the purifier of our hearts and minds. He is the living Way to the new creation of which Saint Paul writes.

And it is upon these things, these historical events, these Sacred words of Scripture, that every human mind and heart is to be firstly and truly focused. Reconciliation through Jesus flows from Heaven. Our names, who we are called to be, flow from Heaven. We are lambs in need of the Heavenly Shepherd at all times, for wolves, which are both spiritual and physical, will always try to instil fear, will try to water down the good and saving demands of Heaven, of Jesus. May we grow in knowledge and longing for Heaven through Jesus Christ.

## Chapter Fifteen

The lawyer desires to justify himself. The Greek word for justify, *dikaiosai*, means to be acquitted, innocent, free, and righteous. From what does the lawyer wish to be redeemed? Truly the lawyer senses that following the Commandments is somehow not enough, or that they are not yet totally complete, not fulfilled. There is something gnawing at his heart, something which will not go away.

In the whom the first reading, Moses, through Commandments were given, is emphatic that the word of the Lord is very near, it is in hearts and minds. This is a very straightforward understanding of the way that the Israelites should obey the

Lord. It seems that there is little recourse for Heaven; all is rather horizontal, not too difficult.

But it is when Jesus mentions, "your neighbour", that the lawyer feels a sense of shame, of guilt, "desiring to justify himself". The Jewish understanding of 'loving your neighbour as yourself' did not envisage those outside the Israelite household. The meaning of neighbour here is not universal.

To make this point clear, that of the Jewish limited reading of 'neighbour', Jesus offers the parable of the Good Samaritan.

To Jews at the time of Jesus a good Samaritan was an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Note how after Jesus has told the story the lawyer cannot even say that the compassionate neighbour was a Samaritan; he refers to him as, "the one". Jesus is fulfilling the Law, completing the Law to show that 'neighbour' includes every person.

So the lawyer, deep inside his heart, in his conscience, senses that he is failing here, hence his, "desiring to justify himself". And it is here that we begin to see the glory of Jesus Christ, the utterly limitless expanse of Christianity.

Saint Paul teaches us that creation is by Jesus, through Jesus, and for Jesus. The entire cosmos is Christian, of Christ; the entire cosmos is an expression of the Word of God. Saint Paul declares that all creation is for Jesus. What does this 'for' mean? Stating that Jesus is, "the first born of all creation", is important. The firstborn son in Jewish tradition received a great blessing from their father; in Exodus the whole of Israel is referred to as the firstborn son; and when Saint Paul describes Jesus as the firstborn of all creation we grasp that the great Apostle is referring to the resurrected Jesus Christ. For Jesus, by defeating sin and death in the Resurrection, becomes the future, the

trailblazer; He is the firstborn of redeemed creation. Yes, absolutely, creation is for Jesus.

And by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we share in Jesus's firstborn nature, this new creation of Jesus because of Who He is. Jesus is eternal righteous love, the truly Just One in human nature. Love and justice conquer on the Cross; hence, Jesus is the Shepherd of every heart and mind. The man or woman who is becoming recreated, becoming a firstborn with Jesus, can truly say, "as for me, in justice I shall behold your face; I shall be filled with the vision of your glory," as the Entrance Antiphon sings. Jesus reveals that in Him, for Whom we are created, we are brothers and sisters, we are each other's neighbours, now and for ever.

And so to the lawyer. He is looking for the love and justice of Jesus Christ, who is the Healer and the Saviour of every man and woman. The love and righteousness of Jesus Christ, poured out in His Sacred Blood has made us all neighbours, reconciled to God and each other. May we live this.

## Chapter Sixteen

The disposition of our hearts is the soil and the seed from which every one of our acts and words takes shape. God wants to give us true hearts of flesh, as Ezekiel writes.

Saint Paul writes of how he rejoices in his sufferings for our sake. What does he mean by this? Saint Paul, at one point, thought he could please the Lord by taking pride in his observances, in his own obedience to the Law. He was zealous for his own perfection.

But Jesus dramatically showed Paul that he can only enter the holiness of eternal life, by accepting it as a free gift from Jesus. The blinding power of Jesus's risen glory taught this brilliantly educated Jew that salvation cannot be earned at all. How can any of us really ever do anything which is truly worthy of the eternal wonder of Heaven, and this says nothing of our inherited wound of Original Sin.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, is willing to suffer any hardship, in order that we might understand the glory of Christ, promised in the Scriptures for generations, but now made manifest in Jesus. He writes of the hope of glory, that we can become mature in Christ, and see how every aspect of our life needs, in fact, aches for the healing and undefeatable righteous love of Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul would gladly embrace any hardship for each of us that we might know how utterly true and tremendous the Lord is, and so choose to follow Him. As Jesus was prepared to become the perfect innocent Lamb in sinners' hands, to defeat them with divine righteous love, so Saint Paul will also continue in this way of the cross, that we might be converted by his sufferings, which point to Jesus's.

Saint Paul is on fire to live the charity of God, which is offered to us in Jesus. Saint Paul has truly chosen the good portion. Saint Mary of Bethany, who by ancient tradition is also recognised as Saint Mary Magdalen, knows that here, to bow down, to listen at the sacred Feet of Jesus is the absolute Good. This Gospel passage is not really about who does what, but, like Saint Paul, it hinges upon whether our hearts are truly ready to welcome Jesus. Martha could have prepared hospitality without losing any peace and love of the Lord, but instead she rudely ignores Mary and becomes painfully distracted. The Greek

word here for distracted is strong, it means succumbing to inner agitation, being dragged about on every side. Mary is won over by Jesus's glory; Martha has turned away with crippling anxiety.

Abraham, in the first reading, is a great example, like Saint Paul, of a man who never loses his desire to adore and serve the Lord. He is challenged by great heat, but acts in haste to provide even more than he first offered - for he also sacrifices a young fine calf, reminiscent of an innocent lamb. Abraham senses that serving the Lord is everything, that in the Lord is our utter hope and glory.

Saint Paul learnt that all hearts and minds need to be healed and made new by grace from Heaven, found only in Jesus. Saint Mary, Martha's sister, was open to receiving wisdom and love from Heaven, pouring forth from Jesus's lips and presence. And Abraham, our father in faith, showed how willing he was to serve the Lord, filled with the Spirit of the Lord. So how are we? Are our minds filled with the living and saving wisdom of the Lord? Are we ready to give all for Jesus? What is holding each of us back?

## Chapter Seventeen

When we approach Saint Mary Magdalen, we meet a woman whose meaning in the prayer and thought of the Church is so rich. The most inspiring theologians have reflected upon her for over a thousand years. Luminaries such as Tertullian, Pope Saint Gregory the Great, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Bede the Venerable, Saint Anselm of Canterbury, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Thomas More, Saint John Fisher, Saint Teresa of Ávila, Saint John of the Cross,

Saint Francis de Sales, Anne Catherine Emmerich, Saint John Henry Newman, and Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity have all reflected on the transformation and love of this woman for Jesus Christ.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great, and others, propose a theory that identifies Saint Mary Magdalen with Saint Mary of Bethany, and with the penitent woman who courageously and devotedly anoints Jesus's feet with tears and ointment, wiping them with her hair, at the beginning of His public ministry in Saint Luke. At the second anointing in the Gospels - the latter taking place a few weeks before Jesus's death - the anointer is named by Saint John as Saint Mary of Bethany, who again anoints Jesus's feet with ointment and with her hair. Saint John also mentions that she had previously anointed Jesus's feet with ointment and her hair, thus pointing to the earlier act.

Magdala was a city not far from Galilee, and, according to a Jewish Talmudic expression, means curling one's hair, suggesting moral impropriety. The name Magdalene is derived from this, and many statues depict this great Saint with long curly hair; Jewish Rabbis also speak of the moral corruption of Magdala. We first encounter our Patroness in Saint Luke's Gospel, straight after the story of the penitent sinner anointing Jesus, where Saint Luke names Mary Magdalen as a woman who had been delivered from seven demons.

What is unavoidable is that Saint Mary Magdalen's whole life was changed through her encounter with Jesus. She returns to Bethany and, with Martha and Lazarus, becomes a great disciple of the Most Sacred and Holy Lord Jesus. She was at the foot of the Cross and, as our Gospel teaches, was first to enter the empty tomb it is a beautiful touch that the angels are seated at exactly the places where she had anointed the Saviour:

head and feet. She is the first to experience the staggering glory of the risen Lord Jesus, and becomes the Apostle to the Apostles, by running to tell them. Further, tradition teaches us that she died in France, Provence, at Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, where she spent her last thirty years, embracing a life of solitude and prayer.

The reading from the Song of Songs is an inspired reflection of Saint Mary Magdalen's searching for Jesus: rising early, finding others who are not Jesus and then finding Him, Him who her soul loves. The reading from Saint Paul speaks words which resonate with the Magdalene, for she is gloriously controlled, or compelled by the love of Christ; she sought Him who had delivered her, for Him Who had died and is now arisen! Whilst she lived, she was becoming a new creation, turning away from merely a fleshly perception of Him, to one which was and is utterly rooted in the Spirit of the Lord, who is everlasting Life.

For Saint Mary Magdalen, Jesus was and is her all. May we, with Saint Mary Magdalen, long to know Jesus so deeply and in the words of the Psalm, sing, "Your loving mercy is better than life; my lips will speak your praise".

## **Chapter Eighteen**

It's about prayer this Sunday. Prayer is essential for humans, the most important thing.

The human mind has a voracious appetite to know all sorts. Men and women can also become aware of the extraordinary depths of feelings which reside in their souls. And in our

society today there is an unbridled push which encourages men and women, especially our young, to explore their feelings without any acknowledgement of the need for right reason and the need for true boundaries. Consequently, there is much mindlessness, confusion, and unhappiness in the lives of many and this is the result of not knowing or trusting in the right path.

Everything in this finite and created universe has a purpose, an end, a telos. The human person is unique in that our purpose is to discover, spiritually, rationally, and emotionally, the truth written into creation, and then to wonder at its Author. The human person also has the potential to be purified by beauty, to be healed by goodness, to find complete meaning in giving oneself. And as free will is necessary for love and virtue; we can, also, turn away from what is actually good and so weaken and harm our souls. In the book of Wisdom, it says, "for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?"

The human persons created spiritual powers can only ever find their true flourishing, their purpose in their Creator.

Prayer is the necessary relationship with our Creator, by which we can actually grow: Moses grew in faith through his prayer of dialogue. Prayer is always humble. The truthful person will also recognise the disorder in their minds and in their hearts. Indeed, that quotation from Wisdom speaks of pride, of man's arrogance in not being willing to see that we need and are called to be in a loving bond with the Creator.

It is in Jesus Christ alone that prayer finds its purpose, its end, its telos. To pray to Jesus, which is only possible in the Holy Spirit, Jesus the human soul, heart, and mind with new life. The pride and arrogance, the disobedience, which caused the

historical Original Sin has been atoned for by Jesus's perfect loving obedience to His Father. And so true Christian prayer is a movement in the Holy Spirit, who pours into us Jesus's atoning forgiveness thus making us alive in righteousness for the Father. Prayer is life between the human person and the Trinity. Prayer is the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth coming into being in the very man or woman who is praying.

Jesus, in teaching us to pray, commands that we first acknowledge that our Father is holy. Immediately we call God Father. Let us not take this intimacy for granted. It was won for us by Jesus's Precious Blood upon the Cross. The Body and Blood of Jesus, the life of Heaven, is also referred to in the Lord's Prayers as 'daily bread' for the Greek word we translate as daily means supernatural. In the Lord's Prayer Sacrifice of the we are praying for the sacrifice of the Mass, for the true healing and glorification of our souls, to be good, to become holy.

Utterly crucial to prayer is our forgiving others. Bitterness and resentment blocks Jesus's grace. Jesus is salvation incarnate, His love fashions a new heart within us, even fit for the Father, there bitterness and resentment can never coexist. And Prayer is the air on which the human soul depends. The Lord waits for us to live in this silent language of prayer.

## Chapter Nineteen

The truly free man or woman wills to give all to all. How do we arrive at this state? Does this proposition sound desirous to us?

Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus has been speaking about the Holy Spirit, whom we ignore at our eternal peril. And then someone in the crowd speaks aloud about totally temporal matters: money and his share of an inheritance. Jesus, reading the heart of this man, then offers timeless teaching.

In the parable, the man is rich and he has just become even richer. All the goods are his, all the grain is his. His barns will be torn down - how wasteful and then he will build larger barns. This rich man's soul - the very deepest part of him - has become utterly focussed on the temporal, on the material. All is about him and his comfort. The Greek for merry, in this context, has a sense of the man's own inner victory. The rich man is self-centred. No-one else matters. He does not want to give anything to anyone else. Me, me, me.

Fool! God says. God then implies that all the rich man's riches will be given to others. We see that being rich towards God is inseparable from concern and giving to others. In Saint Luke's Gospel we also have the story of Abraham, the rich man, and Lazarus: there the unnamed rich man is cast into hell for he never concerns himself with the poor and humble Lazarus God expects his faithful ones to have concern and to give to others.

In the reading from Ecclesiastes the Preacher is also deeply focused on himself. The word vanity has two main meanings: someone who has excessive pride in his or her own achievements or appearances; and something which is futile and meaningless. The Gospel is the first meaning: the rich man is excessively proud in his own achievements to the exclusion of everyone else. The reading from Ecclesiastes is the latter.

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes, sees everything as futile and meaningless. He is much sadder than the rich man, for he has absolutely no enjoyment from his striving, his toil; his so-called

wisdom and so-called knowledge have left him possessive over his gains. And he states it would be an evil, it would be a vanity if anyone should enjoy the fruit of his labours. He, like the rich man, does not want to share, resents that someone should benefit from his achievements. But while the rich man in the Gospel is oblivious to his wicked spiritual poverty, the Preacher's heavy and sad heart is searching for a way, for hope.

Jesus is that hope: Jesus gives all for each of us. God gives. Before time, the Father gives all eternally to the Son, and the Son responds eternally, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. And it is this same Holy Spirit Who fills us with the risen Lord Jesus, who has given his all and gives His all as the divine perfect sacrifice for all sin. We see that the essence of God is total self-giving. Divine love gives, this is pure goodness.

And we, Christians, are being remade in this goodness from Heaven. In the readings we see that we are to honour the gifts, the blessings of creation, but with a necessary supernatural love from Heaven, which concerns the needs of others, too. In Jesus, by the healing of our hearts and minds, and so in His freedom, we can grow in love for all, and we strive, in Jesus, to give ourselves for all. To spend our lives for Jesus, and learning to give like Him, is the source of all hope and joy.

## Chapter Twenty

We must speak of humility; the only disposition that leads to Heaven.

In the reading from Sirach, a book which is also called Ecclesiasticus – meaning the Church's little book, as it was so important for moral instruction in the early church – we are

taught how humility is the path to finding glorious favour with the Lord. But humility is not something timid or weak, no it is courageous, gleaming with faith and understanding.

Sirach continues with its contrary disposition: pride, likening it to a deadly plant, to wickedness at the root of the human person. He writes, “the affliction of the proud has no healing.” Sirach then points to the parables of the Lord for understanding humility.

Jesus’s parables in the Gospel teach us about living in humility. Jesus notes how the guests were choosing high places for themselves, basking in their own importance at the dinner. First, Jesus takes us to a wedding feast. To be invited to a wedding banquet – a sign of the Heavenly Wedding Supper of the Lamb – is to be favoured, chosen.

We are Invited into a time, a place of transforming celebration, of being united into the new life of the bride and bridegroom. At the Mass, the Wedding Banquet between us and the Sacrificial Lamb of God, we are invited to receive new life, the risen victory of Jesus’s love over all sin, over all self-centredness, over all pride. We are invited to taste Heavenly Food, in divine company. The sublime humility of Jesus in the Mass for us can only be truly received by a humble person.

The Pharisees are proud. They come to dine on their own terms. Closed to the abundance of the new, healing, purifying, challenging life they need, which the Lord is offering each of them. Again, “The affliction of the proud has no healing,” as Sirach writes. The man or woman who attends the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, the Mass, must be utterly humbled by the sublime wedding invitation he or she is receiving, an invitation written in the holy blood of our Lord Jesus.

The Lord has so much to say to us, so much to teach us, so much Heavenly love to lavish upon us. It is our greatest privilege to learn humility and gratitude to the Lord, longing for holy Mass every Sunday. There we are called to relive the creation-healing Passion, the death-destroying Resurrection, and the power of the Holy Spirit bringing us Jesus, bringing us Heaven. Pride says no in all sorts of ways, humility says yes, simply and courageously, to Jesus.

The intelligent person, the wise person, thus sees that each of us is truly poor, crippled, lame, blind. We need Jesus, that we may be actually filled, remade with His risen ordering, with a burgeoning harmony between body and soul, reason and passion. And in this divine freedom we see others as they truly are: children made for and in absolute need of God. And so we extend hospitality not for mere worldly comfort or social advancement, but that we might help, inspire, teach others to hunger for the only path that leads to Heaven: humility. In following that path, Jesus will never say to us, "I do not know where you come from."

The path of humility teaches us to receive Jesus; the path of humility teaches us to offer hospitality in Jesus's grace, the mediator of the new covenant. Humility is an intelligent, courageous, and passionate choice to be filled, healed by the Son of God, throwing aside all that would lead us astray.