

Sermon for the Feast of St John of the Cross 2015

Let us Pray...

Lord, open our hearts to your desire and guide us so that we may be good stewards of your sacred mysteries and be drawn together in the Community of your Spirit, through Christ our Lord. Amen

John's interpretation of the indwelling of Christ, has interesting connotations for our understanding of the Parousia, otherwise known as the Second Coming. I expect we are all quite familiar with the earlier section of the 14th Chapter of John's Gospel, since it is so often chosen as a reading for funerals. That part when we hear Jesus apparently giving the disciples a reassurance of heaven through the familiar words: 'In my Father's house there are many dwelling places...' (Jn 14:2a). This is an assurance of safety in the future. The disciples' faith in Jesus, carries with it the reward of knowing that He will draw them into heaven to be with Him when the time is right (Jn 14:3)

The verses we heard in our Gospel reading this morning, are less familiar and appear slightly later in the chapter. In them John records Jesus talking of his Second Coming in quite a different fashion. In these verses we see the Johannine Christ promising to dwell **IN** his disciples' after his glorification (Jn 14:18-23).

Interestingly, this seems perfectly in keeping with the early church, when they claim to experience not only God, but Jesus as well. So, for example, in Acts, Jesus encounters Paul at various times in visions (Acts 18:9; 22:17 etc.), and Paul speaks of Christ living '**IN**' him in his letter to the Galatians (Gal. 2:20).

In these passages, we hear of Christ coming back to be present **WITH** his believers on Earth, they are infused with Christ in some way in the present. But John also speaks of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' successor, as fulfilling that same role. On some level, then, the Spirit fulfills Jesus' promise to come again. We see this working itself out in the evidence of the early church. Life lived in the church is life lived in the Spirit. The gathering of believers is the Body of Christ, precisely because Christ is in them by merit of their communal belief.

So then, the words of Christ in today's Gospel reassure His disciples that Jesus' physical departing will not mean they are left all alone. He says, 'I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you' (Jn 14:18). 'I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you'. In one sweeping statement, Christ penetrates and answers the fear of every human heart, abandonment. His church down the ages has benefited from the promises it inherits, promises that no matter what, Christ dwells in us, individually and collectively through our faith and hope. We are the Body of Christ. St John of the Cross, whose feast day we celebrate today, found himself kidnapped by his own brethren, locked in a cell with no light and beaten three times a week – all because they did not like his attempts to reform and change their Carmelite monastic order. Yet in that unbearable dark, cold and desolation, his faith and hope in Christ's love were like fire and light. After nine months he managed to escape with only the spiritual reflections he had recorded in his cell. From that day his life was devoted to sharing his experiences of God's love when he needed it most.

Our Blessed Savior promises us all, that same fire and light amidst the desolation we encounter in *our* lives. As we move closer to a most holy time of year we must therefore ask: who are the abandoned, the orphans, here this Christmas?

The homeless young lady on the street outside? The child whose Christmas has been torn apart because of the separation of his parents? The man who feels rejected because he is unable to join his male partner in spending Christmas with his family since they do not know his orientation? The widow who will be spending her first Christmas alone? The single mother who has spent her last pound providing a Christmas meal for her children? The young lady in the despair of a violent and abusive relationship? The refugee family?

All will be feeling abandoned and seeking a place of safety and acceptance. How may the Churches of Geddington and Weekley enable them to feel safe enough to enter our churches and to encounter life lived in the Spirit of Jesus this Christmas? Amen