

Jesus said to his disciples: <sup>23</sup>“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. *John 14:23*

A cry that has been heard in many a home down through the years, often from a teenager being told off by a parent is that of, “Would you ever leave me alone?” Many a time we might yearn for solitude amidst the hustle and bustle of every day life – but few would yearn for loneliness, the feeling of being utterly alone, the feeling that no-one cares or is interested in our concerns. It is surely no accident that one of the most severe sanctions in the prison system is that of solitary confinement, isolating the individual from all contact with his fellow prisoners.

I would suspect that all of us have experienced loneliness from time to time. Maybe when it was when you started a new school or job – especially if you have moved in from another district. What a breakthrough it was when we made our first friends. Then there is the loneliness that comes from suffering – the breakdown of a relationship. We suddenly feel very alone, very vulnerable. The discovery of illness in ourselves or our partner or someone we love. Then there is the whole trauma of bereavement – again we feel very alone, very vulnerable.

On this Sunday before Ascension Day, our Gospel passage this morning is a passage drawn from John’s account of our Lord’s teaching given in the upper room on the night before he died. Jesus is, for want of a better term, saying his goodbye’s. The disciples, for their part, were distressed at the thought of what lay ahead – distressed at the thought of Jesus’ coming suffering, distressed at the thought that their fellowship with him was drawing to a close, at the prospect of loneliness.

Jesus is, of course, going to experience loneliness, the dark loneliness of Calvary, His cry of desolation ‘My God, my God. Why have you abandoned

me?’ is a cry from his heart that stirs my own. For me, this cry from the cross lies at the heart of my own understanding of God’s love for me in Christ; the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of God’s redeeming, reconciling love. I come to see that Christ, having given so much will never leave me alone, will never abandon me to loneliness. I may choose to walk away from his love, he will never walk away from me.

As I thought on that and re-read our Gospel passage, I thought of those closing words of Jesus as we find them in Matthew’s Gospel. He sends his disciples out in his name to make disciples of all nations, promising them, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” *Matt 28.20*

With all this in mind, let us return to our gospel passage. ‘, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” The parting will be painful but the return is assured.

<sup>23</sup>‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. *John 14:23*

Let us look at the promise that is entailed in this. ‘my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’ Earlier on in this 14<sup>th</sup> chapter we read of Jesus promising his disciples

<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

*John 14:3*

This is a passage that would frequently read at a funeral and would be one of the key texts in our confidence in the face of death.. Here in the passage we read today, he speaks of the Father and the Son coming to lodge with us in this life. This is to be no fleeting visit, this is the Father and the Son living within us through the Holy Spirit. No longer need we be alone, no longer need we experience the loneliness of isolation from God.

Those who love me will keep my word. As I've remarked before, in the Greek in which the New Testament is written there are a number of words that we translate by our single word 'love', ranging from the sensual, through friendship to the spiritual. The word used here is **agapw**. This is a love that is focussed on the interests and needs of the one being loved. It is a self giving love, a love marked by a total self surrender. A mark of my self surrender to Christ is my willingness to put myself at his command, at his disposal as I seek, albeit imperfectly,, to do his will in what I say, in what I do, in what I think.

Now I am still human, I am still weak, and I don't always get it right – but my desire is to serve him.

Then as I move towards God in love and obedience, so the Father moves towards me in love.

and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Again, the word used here for love is that self same **agapw**. It is a love that seeks our the very best for me and in me. As we have already noted, this is not love at a distance, this is love in residence, the Father and the Son who gave himself for me dwelling in me through the Holy Spirit. Secure in his love, I am enabled to grow in my love and obedience for him.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest;  
To give, and not to count the cost,  
to fight, and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil, and not to seek for rest,  
to labour, and not to ask for any reward,  
save that of knowing that we do thy will.

*Prayer of St Ignatius*