



GOSPEL GOSSIP

'I am coming to you...'

John 17. 1-11

Sunday 17th May

This Sunday is the last Sunday in Eastertide. Next week we shall celebrate Pentecost, then Trinity Sunday, and so onto 'ordinary time.' In the last few days, we have rejoiced at the Jesus' ascension into heaven, where he has resumed his rightful place at God the Father's right hand which he surrendered to be born and to die as one of us. In previous Church calendars, this Sunday was known simply as 'the Sunday after Ascension', which was liturgical limbo following Easter and awaiting the gift of the Spirit. More recently, this Sunday has been firmly brought back into the Easter season, as with the disciples, we await Jesus' promised gift of the Spirit.

Jesus' earthly work has been triumphantly completed. In so doing, he has brought glory to his Father, by showing the depth of the Father's love and his commitment to redemption – his final act of reconciliation with the human race. And now Jesus prays to the Father and says that he, Jesus, is coming to him – coming home.

- What does it feel like to be parted from a loved one?
- How do you feel when you leave from one context to enter another?
- What are your feelings about a 'job well done'?
- In what ways can the Son be 'glorified' in the Father and vice versa?
- What would console those left behind?

There is a saying: parting is such sweet sorrow. An oxymoron, but one we all have to grapple with. It is always hard to go on, either to return or to begin. Firstly, there's the anxiety and concern about what lies ahead. For Jesus, this wasn't necessarily so great; he had come from heaven and was now preparing to return. Secondly, there's the anxiety and concern about those you are leaving. How will they feel? How will they cope? Will they keep in touch?

The destination holds no fear for Jesus; this passage is happy, expectant, almost triumphant. But for him, as for us, the fear is in the journey. What will it be like? How long will it be? Will we make it? Is it going to be difficult? Jesus desperately prayed in the Garden on the night he was betrayed that he might be spared the cup of suffering. Peace only came for him when he was able to entrust himself to the Father.

- What is the 'journey' that we all take, willingly or not, and how do you regard it?
- How can you comfort those you are leaving behind?
- Is the journey easier if you know the destination?
- Would it help to have someone with you?
- Does the knowledge of others' support and encouragement – on either side of the journey, provide comfort?

These final reflections of course don't merely refer to the physical, but to the spiritual, but the physical experience can inform and illustrate the spiritual. In this final week of Eastertide, we prepare to change gear. No longer will we have the physical presence of the risen Christ with us, but instead we shall have to live without it. But Jesus doesn't leave us on our own, high and dry. His promise is to be with us, to the end of the age, and this is fulfilled by the giving of the Holy Spirit which we celebrate next week. Although hard, we should rejoice that Jesus is going to the Father.