

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus invites us to accompany Him to Jerusalem. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished". Today we go up. We have changed our direction. For we have completed the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany. In those seasons we have contemplated a certain coming down- God's coming down in his Son, the Word's coming down from the Father to be made flesh; Jesus' coming down to purify and cleanse our consciences. But today we begin to go up. He must go up so that he can die for us. 'Behold we go up' to Jerusalem, and we go up in order to see and experience the love of God, and how that love of God while enduring all sorts of rejection, will keep on loving. So in faith we go up in hope that we can reach forward towards greater wisdom and in love desire to find a passion that alone can heal.

But we might all be a little confused by all this coming down and going up. We follow Jesus faithfully, we hope for the best, but we do not understand what it means to go up to his death. We associate death as a kind of going down, like going down into the pit, or into the grave. We may well be like the Disciples who went up to Jerusalem. They were confused and blinded to the truth, for the more they went up, the less they understood or saw the light. Jesus talked of being mocked, being scourged, put to death, and the third day rising from the dead. Not surprisingly the disciples understood none of these things. It all seems so foreign to us as it did to the Disciples. We associate going up with ascending out of darkness and into light, out of confusion and into clarity, and out of ignorance and into knowledge.

But as they will soon learn, as indeed will we, that going up to Jerusalem with Jesus will involve illumination or enlightenment of the most unusual kind- the illumination that Jesus is God and God is Love. The eyes, of the Apostles, our eyes will be opened, there is no

doubt about that. But we need to cry out first with the blind man in this morning's Gospel, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." We cannot go up with Jesus until we beg for the mercy of God in Jesus Christ to come down to us to open our eyes. Jesus asks the blind man what he desires of him. He replies, "Lord, that I may receive my sight". He does so and so too can we if Jesus comes down to us. We read that he immediately received his sight, and followed Jesus. Vision is the door for us that opens the heart to follow Jesus and to go up with him to Jerusalem. Vision is also the reward bestowed upon all whose faith seeks out the true source of all our healing. Jesus tells that his impending death and suffering will be necessary so that all will be accomplished. And so just as the blind man has received his physical sight, he has also received the inward and spiritual sight which we all have as we go up with Jesus as he prepares for his trials and death. A death for us which will enable us all to go up in our faith and trust in the overwhelming Love of God. Charity is the translation used in the King James Version, which we heard this morning; it is the Queen of Virtues, and as we heard, it outruns faith and fulfills hope. It alone binds God to Man and Man to God. Whatever else we may be capable of, if we do not have Charity deep in our very beings, we are 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' –we are empty, with no spiritual insight.

As we are about to begin the great season of Lent we can remind ourselves that the presence of Christ is the place where Charity is born. It is when we go up, look at the cross and confess, 'Yes, that is the only way which by all our cleverness can be redeemed, by self-giving, by outreaching'. It is then that redemption begins.

This is the presence we have, the presence we seek in the Mass, the presence of one whose body was broken for us and whose blood was outpoured for us. Let us therefore reach out

to him, and in the so doing, we can reach out to each other, and to those who have not joined us this morning. Charity... Love of this kind begins with Christ crucified, and it ends only with the redemption of the world. Knowledge will not redeem. Not that it is an evil thing, it is a good thing; but apart from Charity it is as nothing. This is the message of Quinquagesima Sunday, an urgent message, not one more piece of knowledge, but a summons to embrace that Charity, that Love of Christ now, and to let it be active in the Church and in the world outside. 'Go thou, and do likewise.' That is why, good people here at St Michael's this morning, I can as I also do each year wish that you will keep keep a good and happy Lent. Why happy? Because it is like the trailer of a film; the disciples have seen only that, but we know the glorious ending! So as you go up with Christ you will be aided and sustained by 'the greatest of these Charity. Amen