

Funeral Mass for Sr. Goedele, August 9th 2021

May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe ...

Today's Gospel, describes an almost mystical movement that attempts to picture, to explain, to demonstrate – none of these words really work – the relationship we have in Christ Jesus, in his Spirit, with God the Father and with one another, in the whole body of Christ. Not the image of God on a high and lofty throne, but of an intimacy and love that Christ shares with the Father, and that Christ shares with all those who believe. It gives a foretaste of our hope ... of what it will be when we are all *one in Christ*.

To be *in Christ*, is the essence of what it means to be a Christian. To be *in Christ*, the Risen Christ, 'is the source of that unity which should characterize all members of the church', of all the churches, of all the followers of Christ. To be a Christian is never just about a one to one relationship with Jesus, but a complex – though ultimately simple – union with God, with each other and with the whole of creation.

To look at this more closely, and hopefully see our way more clearly, we can use this text as a lens to look at the monastic path, and of course for us that means the Rule of St. Benedict. The Prologue begins with the imagery of warfare and brave warriors, an image that doesn't sit too comfortably to our times or indeed to us as women, I can't speak for the monks! But by the end of the Prologue the emphasis has shifted from warfare to participation in the life of Jesus and specifically in his passion. Benedict says that through obedience and stability *we shall through patience share in the suffering of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his Kingdom*. Living a share in the Kingdom, living in that place where the Father and the Son, and we individually and in the body of Christ are united. At the nearly end of the Rule, St. Benedict underlines again the importance of obedience – loving obedience – to one another. In fact the word 'obedience' drops out and the pure language of love sets all relationships in the monastery in harmony: *To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life. To that unity for which Christ prayed.*

A week ago I was folding Sr. Goedele's habit to take to the undertakers. It was a strangely familiar action and muscle memory kicked in. I was back folding a brand new habit for a novice, and I was filled with an inarticulate feeling, a sense of completion, of completeness, of a journey begun, lived and ended... a journey begun at baptism, a journey strengthened at our monastic clothing, and continued through profession and the rocky path of monastic life – as our hymn says made smoother by passing feet. For the past two months Sr. Goedele lived – due to covid restrictions – a closeness to the passion of Christ, feeling lost and alone and isolated, that is hard to comprehend. Living her passion close to the passion of the Lord she served in the monastery for sixty years, we pray that she has entered that place of life and peace prepared for us. *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...*

Sr Zoë, Turvey Abbey