

# The Soul's Desire

a sermon preached on the

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

9 May 2010

at

**St Luke's in the City, Christchurch**

by **Fr David Moore**

parish priest

Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:10,22-22:5; John 14:23-29

In a consumerist, market-driven economy desire is the vital ingredient without which the entire system would collapse. 'The market' is predicated upon the commodification of desire – everything can be packaged, marketed, capable of opening up the wallets of the masses. Desire is also the vital ingredient in all relationships – no matter how damaged or contorted it may have become under the heavy burden of life's suffering. There appears to be a universality in the experience of desire. Perhaps there is not a single human activity or endeavour which does not depend upon it. Desire's potency is such that it can render an otherwise-rational and logical person to part company with their money, to fall for a lover, to give themselves to a cause. In its distorted manifestation, desire is the driving force beneath greed, possessiveness, addictions of every kind, all forms of abuse, even state-sanctioned murder. Without doubt, desire is as intimate to us as our breath, as necessary for life as the blood that courses through our veins.

But it would seem that desire is actually largely unconscious. I know I want to have the same consumer item as others – but I don't really know what it is that drives that want, not really. I know that when I am with this person who I desire it's as though I have lost some part of my rational faculties – but I don't really know what it is in this person which has such power over me. This is because when I meet this person, or when I see that consumer item advertised, it is unconscious forces which are activated. The deepest recesses of my being are, by definition, unavailable to rational consciousness – that's why they have such potency. Indeed, it is only possible to come to knowledge of that deepest reality when I meet it outside of me – in that person, that lifestyle, consumer good, that addictive substance, that ideology, that celebrity, and so on.

It is clear that when people met Jesus they encountered something deep within them, previously inaccessible, too deep for consciousness. For those of us who acknowledge that reality cannot be defined merely by what can be measured physically, we know that there is another reality, every bit as real, which is non-physical. When it comes to humans, the Greek scriptures make this distinction by employing two key words: the word *σῶμα* *sōma* to describe the material, physical domain; the word *ψυχή*, the *psyche* to describe the non-material, non-physical domain. The psyche is the seat of our deepest desire. I think that is why we are here. By which I mean, deep down this is what has drawn us to come to this place, to undergo this ritual action together. We are not here, primarily, to do good works of one kind or another, or to belong to a religious club. Rather, we are here because of the barely expressible, largely unconscious desire deep within us. We are only here because something which we cannot ever adequately articulate, which our tradition calls the soul, motivates us, propels us, moves us.

This deepest desire embedded in the soul is, ultimately, for union with the Divine – what St John calls 'abiding'.

"I will ask the Father,  
and he will give you an Advocate to be with you forever.  
This is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive...  
you know the Spirit because she abides with you.  
I will not leave you orphaned:  
I am coming to you..."

On that day you will know that I am in the Father,  
and you in me,  
and I in you.  
Those who keep my commandments are those who love me,  
and those who are loved by me will be loved by my Father...  
and will keep my word, and my Father will love them,  
and we will come to them and make our home with them.”<sup>1</sup>

The Christian has always known that the human soul's deepest desire is for this abiding in the Divine Source. Perhaps we may find St John's language difficult? But of course, how could it be otherwise! All language about the non-material, non-physical domain must necessarily be paradoxical – for only the language of paradox is capable of giving expression to that which cannot be ultimately expressed. St John, like everyone else, is struggling to express the inexpressible. In the history of Christian spirituality there are a great many such struggling expressions – the common thread being this endeavour to articulate the soul's deepest desire for union, one-ness, eternal intimacy with God the Father, Son and Spirit.

But – and this is where the spiritual quest becomes truly perplexing - because God is neither a father, nor a son, nor even a holy spirit, the true desire is for union with the God who is beyond all names and images. And this is the 'moment', so to speak, in the human-Divine intercourse which clarifies the matter – for here is found the utter difference between the Divinely-created desire of the soul, and the mis-direction of desire by projection onto persons, objects, and ideals. When desire is projected outwards, onto persons and objects and even onto good works, there is immediately a kind of ownership, an attempt at possession of them. And, before we know it, we are possessed, and possessive. I know this myself, this possessiveness and being possessed – a source of endless frustration and at times shame. And this is what the Hebrew Scriptures identified as idolatry – the desire for union with the Divine illegitimately projected onto an object or a person. And that is how it is with all desire illegitimately projected outwards. We do not in fact become free, as all the marketing gurus promise – we do not find the liberating peace which Christ gives.<sup>2</sup>

True desire, the desire which arises from the soul which is embedded in the Divine possesses nothing. The true desire which brings us to this liturgy is the desire which experiences profound dis-possession – which is the meaning of Jesus' necessary departure from his human companions. "Do not your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I."<sup>3</sup>

True desire is the womb of total dis-possession. Desire for union with the Divine and the experience of dis-possession from the Divine are of the same fundamental reality – two inseparable movements, a breathing in and a breathing out. This is why we experience the Divine absence so painfully, just as we may experience Presence as dramatic. Of course, it is the Divine absence which distresses us however – no doubt the motive for Jesus' encouragement to rejoice in this experience of absence, dis-possession. The Christian tradition has always known about this necessity of Divine absence – God's imagelessness, and the soul's experience of utter desolation, Nothingness even.

In our time when God has become so domesticated, a 'buddy' we chat to at night – religion so chatty and chummy, when religion too is commodified and marketed – desire experienced in the soul's utter desolation is obviously unpalatable, unacceptable, un-saleable. "But do not your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me you would rejoice that I am going to the Father." "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives."<sup>4</sup>

[david@stlukesinthecity.org.nz](mailto:david@stlukesinthecity.org.nz)

---

<sup>1</sup> John 14:16-17a, 17c-18, 20-21a, 23

<sup>2</sup> John 14:27

<sup>3</sup> John 14:27b-28

<sup>4</sup> John 14:27a