

**“Stay with us, Lord.”**  
*Lk 24:28*

How many times, I wonder, have we been downcast because of this or that circumstance – money worries, relationship problems, difficulties at work or at home, perhaps sickness or even death – and have felt no response from God, have felt Him to be distant, to have abandoned us? It is very easy – is it not? – to think, and to feel, that God is nowhere to be seen when we need Him most. Did not Our Lord Himself feel exactly that on the Cross when He cried, ‘My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?’ This sense of distance or abandonment can be, for many people, the reason why they give up the practice of the Faith, and indeed belief in God altogether.

So it was with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They, like so many other followers of Our Lord, had placed their hope and their trust in Him, only to see Him die on the Cross and be buried: “Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free”. Their longing had come to nothing, their expectations remained unfulfilled How familiar that cry! Someone finds God, only to discover that He seems to be absent when He is most needed.

And yet here is the strange thing: frustrated by the death of Our Lord, and their eyes of faith clouded over by disappointment, the two disciples failed to see that He, at the very moment when they were about to abandon all hope in Him, was there, right beside them, and closer to them than ever, disguised as their fellow traveller.

Amid setback and adversity, when faced with hurdles and obstacles of all sorts, or simply when things have not gone as we think they should have gone, or when God has not helped us in the way that we asked Him to help us, our eyes of faith can be overshadowed by doubt, just as were the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And yet...

And yet, sometimes, in our darkest moments, God, hidden in the obscurity of faith, draws closer to us than we had supposed possible, closer than we had ever imagined, and makes Himself our travelling companion even in the very midst of our wretchedness and misery.

“What great nation is there,” it asks in the Book of Deuteronomy, “that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?” (Deut 4:7, RSV). When we are in a state of grace, when our soul is anchored in Him and we are living in Him and He in us, He could not be closer *whatever* our feelings may be telling us at the time.

It is true that we do not yet see Him face to face – as we shall in the Beatific Vision – but only as through a glass darkly (1 Cor 13:12). Nonetheless, it is in the nature of faith that we *know* He is near us even though we do not *feel* His closeness. And the soul, having once found its God – even if momentarily sensing His distance – cries out with longing, “Stay with me, Lord!”.

He is always with us, even if we, with weak faith, sometimes draw away from Him. Indeed, if we were completely dependent upon our own efforts we would certainly draw away from Him. It is only ever His grace that keeps us close to Him even when we stray from Him, as St Teresa of Avila says, “I know well how little my strength... can achieve if you are not always granting me Your grace and helping me not to forsake You” (cf *Divine Intimacy* p424).

Yet, even when we cannot feel the presence of God, we are – once in a while – granted the privilege of recognizing His presence in the love of a neighbour, or in prayer, or in the sacraments, and chiefly, of course, in the Blessed Sacrament. On these occasions we get a glimpse of God, like a beam of sunlight bursting through the cloud on an overcast day, before being hidden again. But at least, like the presence of

the sun in the sky, we are reminded that God is still there, even if we cannot see or feel Him.

It is at precisely these moments – overcast with the clouds of our doubts and misgivings – that God invites us to a deeper intimacy with Him, and sits down at table with us to share in our deepest longings, and make His presence known, paradoxically, even in those moments when we do not recognize Him. This is where our faith is truly put to the test. Believing in God, praying to Him, talking of Him to others, all these things come comparatively easily when things are going well in life and God is making Himself known to us. But can we cling to Him as we tread wearily along that dusty road, as evening falls, and as the light begins to fade? Can we open our hearts and our homes to Him at those moments in life when we think all is lost?

Then it is that our prayer might turn and, instead of asking Him to stay with us, we might, like St Teresa of Avila, cry out, not so much ‘Stay with us, Lord’, but rather, “Teach us, O Lord, to stay with you”.