

**“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**

Jn 17:3

On 12th May 2021 Bishop Alan Hopes celebrated our patronal feast with us and encouraged us to get a statue of St Pancras. Last Tuesday, 12th May, the feast of St Pancras, and exactly five years to the day, the statue arrived thanks to a very generous legacy left to us by Judy Fell in her will, and thanks to the skilled craftsmanship of the team at Ferdinand Stuflesser in Italy, the same people who made our statue of Our Lady of Ipswich. To have him standing here amongst us at last, 165 years after the church was built, is exciting. Indeed, it is thrilling! We are delighted to welcome our patron to the church over which he has watched for so long.

Look at him closely. He died at the age of fourteen, a boy on the cusp of manhood, full of youthful life and energy. His face shows determination and dignity in the face of adversity. His shirt is white, symbolizing the purity of God’s love. His outer garment is green, symbolizing spiritual renewal and the seed of new life that springs from the sacrifice of martyrdom as well as the hope that is offered to believers in times of tribulation. His red cloak is the colour of the blood of the martyrs, and is edged with the gold of the kingdom of heaven.

In his hand he holds the palm of martyrdom, and an open book on which are written the words, *Venite ad me et ego dabo vobis omnia bona*, ‘Come to me, and I will give you all good things.’ These are the words of Pharaoh to the Old Testament Joseph who has rescued a nation from certain famine and death, and been appointed as second in the land, and to whom all the treasures of Pharaoh’s court are now open (Gen 45:18).

This is what St Pancras holds out to us if only we go to him, as to any saint or to the Blessed Virgin herself, with humble hearts and in a spirit of supplication. But why go to a saint at all? Why not go straight to God?

Well, first, because to love God means to love the things of God. In this context ‘things’ includes people, the angels and saints. If we love God, we should love also those whom He calls His friends (Jn 15:15), those upon whom He has showered special gifts and graces, and who are now reigning with Him as saints in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Second, because God Himself has shown us that it is profitable to pray to His angels and saints because they are the ones who present our prayers before the throne of God, as it tells us in the Book of the Apocalypse (5:8).

And third, because being normal human beings themselves – albeit especially blessed with particular graces and virtues – we can relate to them very readily, and God Himself is sensitive to our need to be able to go to those with whom we have a special affinity. After all, was it not Andrew who drew his brother Simon Peter to Christ in the first place? (Jn 1:42) And did not Philip bring Nathanael to Our Lord? (Jn 1:45) And did not certain Gentiles ask the help of Philip and Andrew when they wanted to see Our Lord? (Jn 12:20-22) God Himself uses people to draw other people to Himself, and in just this way God uses His saints to draw us to Him also.

And having drawn us to Himself, there are no gifts in the heavenly places (Eph1:3) that are not made available to us, if only we approach on bended knee and with a heart that is surrendered to the will of God. ‘Ask, and it shall be given you’ (Mt 7:7).

This is the meaning of the words on St Pancras’ open book: if we ask for the will of God to be done in our lives, including through the intercession of the one whom God Himself has appointed to be our special patron, protector, and guardian, then we will be given ‘all good things.’

‘And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.’ These words of Our Lord from today’s Gospel passage show us that we can come to know God through those whom He sends to us. In the first instance, of course, we can come to know God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. But Our Lord then sends out His own disciples to teach all nations, as we heard on Thursday immediately before Christ ascended back into heaven (Mt 28:19-20). And so it is that St Pancras has been sent to the people of this parish that he might make known to us the goodness of God, and so that we, in turning to our patron saint for guidance, might be shown the way to heaven.

That is what St Pancras does: he points us towards heaven, redirecting our gaze from the passing things of this world to the eternal treasures of heaven. He helps us to grow in penitence and virtue through his prayers, and he helps us to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent, so that we might inherit eternal life.