

This evening we reach the Gospel of S. John, and with it the end of our series introducing the four Gospels. In addition to his gospel, we also have three letters attributed to S. John, and the book of Revelation – traditionally written by S. John on the island of Patmos. Whether these three are in fact authored by the same hand is unclear – they bear certain features and themes in common and are helpfully read together.

S. John's gospel has been described as a 'seamless robe'. S. John proves himself a magisterial author and provides us with carefully crafted narratives and materials. Because of all the gospels, S. John writes most clearly and beautifully of Jesus' divine nature, his gospel is often symbolised by an eagle. This represents the lofty heights to which these descriptions of Jesus' divinity soar.

S. John's Gospel is distinct from each of the gospels we've considered so far. Unlike the gospels of SS. Matthew and Luke, S. John's Gospel doesn't appear to use S. Mark's Gospel as a source. It is therefore not one of the Synoptic Gospels. We remember that the synoptic gospels are those which are 'viewed together', are similar scope and kind. This already reveals to us that S. John's Gospel is quite different from the other Gospels we've considered so far.

S. John omits many events and details that the other evangelists include. There is no Nativity story, no account of Christ's Baptism, or the Last Supper.

In the Synoptic Gospels, our Lord's ministry is described over the course of a year, and the Evangelists describe one visit to Jerusalem at the end of his life. S. John gives an account of Jesus' ministry that is distinct. It is focussed on Jerusalem, and lasts three years. Our Lord spends not one but three Passovers in Jerusalem.

More general features are also distinct. There are no exorcisms in S. John's gospel. And whilst there is plenty of teaching material, there are no parables.

The Jesus that emerges on the pages of S. John's gospel is also distinct. He gives prolonged descriptions of himself, and of what he means for us. 'I am' his watchword. Seven times he introduces images that describe who he is with the phrase 'I am'.

This repeated 'I am' isn't because of ego or self-obsession. This 'I am' teaches us who Jesus is. 'I am' is the name of God revealed in the Old Testament. Through this repeated use of 'I am', we learn again that Jesus is no ordinary human being. Jesus is God himself.

Each 'I am' is illustrated with an image that teaches us more about who Jesus is. He says I am 'the bread of life', 'the light of the world', 'the gate', 'the good shepherd', 'the resurrection', 'the life', 'the true vine'. Each of these illustrate something of the person of Jesus, and what his presence among us means. Each points to the abundance of life that is opened to us by the presence of God among us. He enlightens us as the light of the world; he opens up eternal life to us as the gate, the resurrection and the life; he guides us as the shepherd; he sustains and refreshes us as the vine.

Throughout his Gospel, John paints this picture for us of who Christ is. At the end of the chapter 1, the disciple Philip says to Nathanael: 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael says to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip says to 'Come and see'.

St. John throughout his gospel makes the same invitation to us. 'Come and see'. Come and see who Jesus is. Come and see for yourselves what his life among us means.

Jesus responds to the Nathaniel that: You will see greater things than these.' 'Very truly...you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (John 1.51).

In Jesus, we look upon things that even angels desire to look on. We see God himself and the angels ascend and descend to look at that which we alone have been priveleged to see. God has not become an angel. God has become a human being. We alone are priveleged to share in that divine nature, and see God in this way.

When we think what S. John's gospel has to say to us here and now, the theme of what it means to see Jesus might be the most important. It is a constant theme of S. John's Gospel, and his letters explore how we who do not see Jesus in the same way as those blessed disciples, come to believe in him who we see now only with the eyes of faith. There are numerous examples of this in his Gospel: Thomas' desire to see Jesus' wounds, the numerous 'signs' Jesus works – indications of who the person of Jesus is. Yet, S. John writes: 'happy are those who do not see and yet believe' (John 20.29).

In a few moments, we'll enjoy the privelege of gazing on our Lord with the eyes of faith¹. We'll look upon and adore our God in his sacramental presence. We'll come face to face with Jesus as the bread of life. We here, have come and we will see. And as we see, God will sustain us and send us back out into the world with his blessing.

S. John ends his gospel with the reflection: there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written (John 21.25).

We might say the same thing about our introduction to the gospel of S. John, and our introduction to the Gospels more generally. There is much more about the gospels to say. There is much more in the gospels to read, and to read again and again throughout our Christian lives. And I would encourage you to do so.

¹ This address was originally given before a service of Benediction.

To end our series, we can do little better than reflect upon the words with which S. John begins his Gospel. These words used to come at the end of each and every Mass and in them we find the story which all of our evangelists endeavoured to tell. We find the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ – God with us, and for us, as one of us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (John 1.1-14).

May S. John pray for us now and always. Amen².

² An address given by Fr Simon Cuff during Evensong and Benediction on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 2014.