

Dear Friends,

John 1: 29-34

John baptised Jesus in the river Jordan. As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit came down on him like a dove and remained on him. We are taking a slow motion look at this movement of the Spirit to Jesus. Last time we saw phase one, the Spirit comes from God and phase two, the Spirit longs for Jesus.

This time we'll look at phase three, **the Spirit fixes the gaze upon Jesus**. The Spirit's intention is to go directly to Jesus. The best way to do this is by turning the attention fully to Jesus and then being very focused about heading towards him.

The Spirit does this deliberately with the sort of concentration that an archer gives to hitting the bull's eye at the centre of the target. To achieve this the archer will fix her gaze precisely on the point she wants to hit. She will get her eye, the arrow and her target in line with each other. She will do her best to shut everything else out. She will try to make her body as still as it can be. She may even have been trained to slow down her heart beat and her breathing as much as is humanly possible. All her focus, awareness, and attention are upon the target at which she is aiming. Then she lets the arrow go.

Teresa of Avilla encouraged people to fix their gaze upon Jesus. She helped people to pray. One suggestion she made was to pray not with words but with the imagination. She suggested that you imagine yourself standing before Jesus holding him in contemplation; that you turn your eyes upon him and look full in his wonderful face; and then, that you notice him looking at you humbly and with love.

Turning your attention to Jesus is one of the key elements in the Christian life. When someone becomes a member of the Church, they are asked where their life is heading, in which direction they are facing. The question asked is, "Do you turn to God, trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and in the Holy Spirit as Helper and Guide?" They answer, "with God's help I will". They declare their intention to turn their gaze and their lives towards God.

The decision to turn to God is not a one off. It's one we need to keep making at every moment. I find myself needing to make it when I pray. My preference is to pray in silence. My intention is to be still and open to the presence and action of God. The reality is that my focus is not usually very good. I spend a lot of time with my mind ranging over every possible topic. When I notice that this has happened, I gently return my attention to God.

Sometimes it feels as though this is all that the Christian life is, a constant deciding to turn back to God. Like the Prodigal Son we keep realising that we've wandered away and need to come to our senses. We keep needing to turn our eyes towards home and ourselves back to the Father. You are called to do this once again by uniting with the Spirit in fixing your gaze upon Jesus.

God bless you,

Tony