

Our dear friends,

One very practical word first! More and more of us are now using email. Although we love our printed version of the newsletter, the price of postage is now such that we would be grateful if those of you who use email could receive our twice yearly newsletters by email. Our email address is [sistersofjesusway@redacre.org.uk](mailto:sistersofjesusway@redacre.org.uk) Please email us with yours. If you change your email address please let us know.



We are again grateful for all the help that we have received from friends and send a big thank you to each one of you. We were greatly encouraged by the response to our CD. The words occurring most often in emails or letters have been, “beautiful” and “peaceful”. We have been delighted to hear how it has travelled to places we are never likely to visit. Hundreds have now been distributed. If you would like any further information it is on our website [www.redacre.org.uk](http://www.redacre.org.uk) We have added more helpful and encouraging thoughts for the day so do visit us there!

We recently had the first baptism by full immersion in our chapel. Elliot, who has been with us for over 15 months, was baptised by Graeme, our vicar, and a few weeks later confirmed. They were both joyful occasions. We felt that for us too it was a new beginning. We have Joanna with us for twelve months so this has further expanded our family.

Many of you remembered the anniversary of Sister Lynda’s death. This is a tribute to how greatly she is still loved and remembered. We also appreciated your kind thoughts and prayers. We decided to have a joyful celebration of heaven; after all it was Lynda’s first birthday in heaven. We knew that this is what she would have wanted – not a sad remembering of her life. It was a beautiful day in every way. The sun shone on us and the chapel was filled with peach, gold and white roses. We gathered branches from our beech trees just coming into leaf with the delicate green of spring. Ribbons of gold fell from the cross and wound their way around flowers and leaves. Singing filled the air. We would like to think that angels with their beautiful harmonies accompanied us.

In the morning we had studied scripture. Sometimes people say that we know very little about life after death. The bible in places is surprisingly detailed. Take eternal life from the New Testament and there is very little left – it weaves its way throughout the pages. We have to choose what we believe, the scepticism surrounding us or our bibles, especially the words of Jesus. It was not all singing in the chapel in the afternoon. We also listened to the words of the saints from long ago as well as those more recent including some we have known. The day was full of heaven. It was quite difficult for us the next day coming down to earth with a bump!

Sometimes we are asked who goes to heaven. Usually there is a concern behind this question about a relative or a friend who is an unbeliever. It is true there is nothing to suggest in Scripture that everyone arrives at the beautiful gates and is given an entrance. Perhaps we can share some thoughts that have helped us in this area through the years.

It doesn’t always depend, as sometimes we are wont to believe, on an assured conviction that we have been saved through faith with the corollary that no-one else will make it. Jesus himself told the parable of Lazarus at a rich man’s gate. He was “covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.” There is no mention of saving faith. It seems that his suffering opened

the way, whereas the rich man, who may have had an impeccably orthodox theology, was barred and turned away.

Perhaps, A J Cronin in his novel, "The Keys of the Kingdom", comes near the truth. Father Francis is beside his dying friend, Tulloch, who has come to help him battle the plague in Pai-tan, a remote area of China. The doughty Scots doctor, an unrepentant agnostic whose life was ebbing away, had given his life for others. He says to Francis, "Don't delude yourself ..... I'm not repentant". The priest replies gently, "All human suffering is an act of repentance." <sup>ii</sup>

In our chapel during our heaven celebration we had an enlarged picture of an icon "Jesus, the Shepherd" carrying his sheep on his strong shoulders. Those who are afflicted are held in the love of God until that day when he himself wipes all tears from their eyes in that place where suffering will be no more. The valley of the shadow can be long and dark. The novel continues, "Weakly Tulloch reached out his hand and let it fall on Francis's arm. 'Man, I've never loved ye so much as I do now.....for not trying to bully me to heaven.'"  
,, <sup>iii</sup>

It is never too late. We saw someone adamantly opposed to the Christian faith repent the last day of her life not through any pressure on our part. We were so taken by surprise that we sought some assurance that this was real. A Sister opened a Bible seeking a word of confirmation and glancing down saw written, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."<sup>iv</sup> As it was written so it happened and we knew that the Lord had come to her.

There is a hint in "The Keys of the Kingdom", that Tulloch yielded at the end. His dying words referred to a fight they had had as young boys in the small town by the River Tweed, "Our fight .....Francis.....more than sixpence to get my sins forgiven."<sup>v</sup> "Father Francis began blindly, in a low and strangled voice, the De Profundis, 'out of the depth have I cried to thee, O Lord. Lord hear my voice ...because with the Lord there is mercy: and with him plentiful redemption.' "<sup>vi</sup> Don't let us tie ourselves up in knots over who goes to heaven and who doesn't. "With the Lord there is mercy" and there we should leave it.

Death in our day and age is the great taboo subject. Even as Christians we very rarely speak about heaven. Yet this is not so in places where Christians are persecuted. One has only to listen to the hauntingly beautiful songs of the North Korean or Chinese churches to realise that they are living in the reality of heaven in a way that we in our Westernised society are nowhere near. A South Sudanese Christian put it succinctly when asked why that church was so joyful, "Because God has given us another day and because we are going to heaven."<sup>vii</sup>

Yet we are all urged in the New Testament - "set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."<sup>viii</sup> Elsewhere St Paul writes, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."<sup>ix</sup> St Paul urges us to fix our eyes on unseen realities - in other words to keep heaven constantly in view! The cares of this world sometimes seem overwhelming but so also do the many things we hold dear, sometimes too dear. Heaven fades from our thoughts. We are caught completely off our guard when death intrudes into our lives. Without diminishing at all the intensity of grief which we know all too well and certainly not denying it, nevertheless for Christians death has lost its sting.<sup>x</sup>

What can we do to be prepared? It is helpful to become familiar with those verses in the Bible which refer to heaven. There are many of them. Did you know that in the letter to the Corinthians St Paul writes about the new bodies that we will have which will be related to these bodies but different <sup>xi</sup> or that Jesus said, "We will be like the angels" <sup>xii</sup> (although not angels). St Paul also said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" <sup>xiii</sup> and "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far". <sup>xiv</sup>

Many years ago we were urged to keep a heaven book. In it we write down anything that we find that helps to turn our minds towards heaven. So we have the words of the saints of all generations, songs and quotations from scripture. We are very grateful that we were given this advice.

Prayer draws us closer to God and therefore closer to heaven. It was St Paul who said that he entered Paradise in prayer.<sup>xv</sup> It is the same word that Jesus used with the dying thief – somewhere very beautiful. St Paul doesn't suggest for a minute that this was an every day occurrence and it certainly isn't with us. But unseen realities become real when we pray. They will forever be far from us if we don't pray.

Some of us are captivated by the beauty of this world. The next time we look at a beautiful sunset we can consciously think, if this world is so beautiful how much more beautiful heaven will be. Slowly but surely heaven becomes real and dear to us.

Mother Teresa says in her own inimitable down-to-earth way, "If it was properly explained that death was nothing but going home to God, then there would be no fear." All of life is a preparation for our home-going.

May the Lord Jesus bless and keep you,

Sisters of Jesus Way

- 
- i Luke 16:19-22
  - ii The Keys of the Kingdom A J Cronin pg.286
  - iii Ibid
  - iv Luke 23:43
  - v The Keys of the Kingdom A J Cronin pg 286
  - vi Psalm 130
  - vii Barnabas Fund Mag. Mar/Apr 2009
  - viii Col 3:2-3
  - ix 2 Cor. 4:18
  - x 1 Cor 15:55
  - xi 1 Cor 15:35
  - xii Mark 12:25
  - xiii Phil 1:21
  - xiv Phil 1:23
  - xv 2 Cor 12:4

