

Today's gospel is part of Jesus's last discourse to his Apostles before his death, delivered after the end of the Last Supper and after Judas had left.

He calls his apostles 'friends' not 'servi' (meaning slaves or servants) and tells them he has for them

A NEW COMMANDMENT: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. And so you should love one another. Note the pattern, as with He sent me, so I send you, and so you must send others.

How is this commandment NEW? Perhaps 'love one another' is an addition; perhaps it also calls for a new intensity of thought and feeling, a new level of love. Its model after all is the love between Jesus and his Father.

How do we strive for this? How do we combine reverence for the divinity of Christ with this intense love for him?

Perhaps spiritual life is like a spiral staircase within a tall tower, with several floors, and for each floor there is a window facing West.

It is very dark and we grope our way to the first floor. We get there and look out of the window and see what seems to be a long and beautiful lake stretching away from us far to the West. But we cannot see much of it because, besides the darkness of the place, our own eyes seem bleary, and everything looked blurred. Even the window is dirty and far from transparent.

But as we looked we seemed to hear a voice suggesting that we rinse our eyes, clean our glasses and inviting us to plod on upwards.

We do so, and on the way we see some water and try to clean our glasses. It also seems to be getting a bit lighter. So we reach the next floor. There the West window is a little cleaner, we can see the lake a little better and so see more of its beauty. Our desire to have a better view of the lake is stronger. Then again we hear this voice inviting us to climb higher, which we do, and we notice that we are certainly climbing higher but from each floor we are looking in the same direction, to the West.

As we go on to the third floor, we feel that we are climbing rather than plodding, and rather more eagerly and easily. The window is cleaner and we see the lake better but still a little blurred. The more we see, the more attractive it looks, and we can see small waves and some colors, making the surface more interesting.

Again we hear the voice and clamber on towards the top floor of the spiral stair. By now if we really have persevered, the light is normal, the window is clean our own glasses are clean and our eyes no longer blurry. And there is the lake in most of, or even all, its glory. We hope that when we reach the lake we shall discover that its name is either heaven or purgatory, and NOT anything else.

