

Yesterday we thought about salvation as the birth of a baby. Today we are going to make the baby grow up, and think about prayer as a proposal of marriage.

There's a certain distance between longing for something and asking for it. In the world as we've allowed it to develop there is a whole industry - called the advertising industry - which exists to push people over from longing to asking.

Desire, of itself, can be terribly specific. You have probably met very young children whose lives have become almost compulsive - can't eat off anything except Thomas the Tank Engine, can't sleep without bunny rabbit, must hold dirty old blanket when visitors come, and so forth. Bigger people - and I'm not saying *more adult* people - can get this way about one another, and these compulsive desires can wreak enormous havoc.

Saint Augustine talks about desire in quite opposite terms. For him, desire was good in itself - even especially good when unsatisfied. What refusing to satisfy desire does, he said, is to make the heart grow greater. The feeling if you're really hungry, of having a growing and cavernous space of emptiness inside you, is a good analogy. You start off fancying a custard cream; but if you allow yourself to wait long enough, you end up desiring the Banquet in the Kingdom of God.

Babies can't wait for their desire to be satisfied, and indeed it is very beautiful to see a howling, obsessive, single-minded baby suddenly given what he wants; the transformation into an industrious enjoyment, with only a vague slurping noise as accompaniment, is instantaneous.

But we have to be brought to the point where we choose the great choice, where we allow our longings to crystallise out into a request, a naming of names, a commitment. The moment where the young man goes down on his knees to ask comes to mind. There is great risk, awful fear, but at least the waiting is over, and the moment of truth has arrived.

Our religion is a containing of all our desire, against the moment when we go down on our knees to ask. Coming to know Jesus Christ is the Way to go in to that awesome space; he said *I am the gate of the sheepfold* and *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. You can study him, and circle round him, and toy with the idea of him. But there comes a moment when you ask him to lead you and save you. Nothing will do then, but the whole of your heart. You have been shown that he places no limit on his love for you. All that is required of you is to place no limits on your surrender to him.

*Ask, and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete.*