

When Stephen has his eyes opened to the glory of God and declares:

*I can see heaven thrown open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*

he makes explicit, not a future, but a *present* reality for all of us, in Christ. Shortly after Easter we heard an ancient author using similar language to express what has happened to us in Christ and we get, also, a sense that there is more to come, or rather, a longing for the union to be experienced at its fullness: ‘We are baptised into Christ and have *put on Christ*’, we are ‘conformed to the Son of God’, ‘you share in Christ – you have become Christs’ – ‘buried *with him* by baptism into his death.’ It’s the language of love, of intimacy, of wanting to be with the beloved wherever that might be, and we hear it again, today also, in the language of John’s gospel; the language of remaining but taken one step further into the glory that the Son and the Father share as God.

*‘May they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you’*

And this time, not as a prayer *from* us, but as a prayer from Christ *for* us, expressing his desire, and the Father’s, for us to be one in God. This is, perhaps, the bit we find difficult to believe. Fair enough, I can long to be saved – to belong to Christ – to be taken up to heaven. Who wouldn’t want to be? But here it is God, through Christ, expressing *God’s* desire for *us*. This isn’t just what *we* want; it’s what God wants. And the *Book of Revelation* makes clear that this longing of God for us is God’s last word.

*‘The Spirit and the Bride say “Come”. Let everyone who listens answer “Come”. Then let all who are thirsty come; all who want it may have the water of life and have it free’*

followed by a warning, missing, ironically, from today’s reading.

*‘If anyone adds . . . (or) if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.’*

For it is God’s last word, God’s last testimony and will for us: the assurance, not of condemnation, but of love. The possibility remains, of course, that we can say no to this. It’s given freely and is ours to freely accept or reject.

Br John Mayhead  
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour