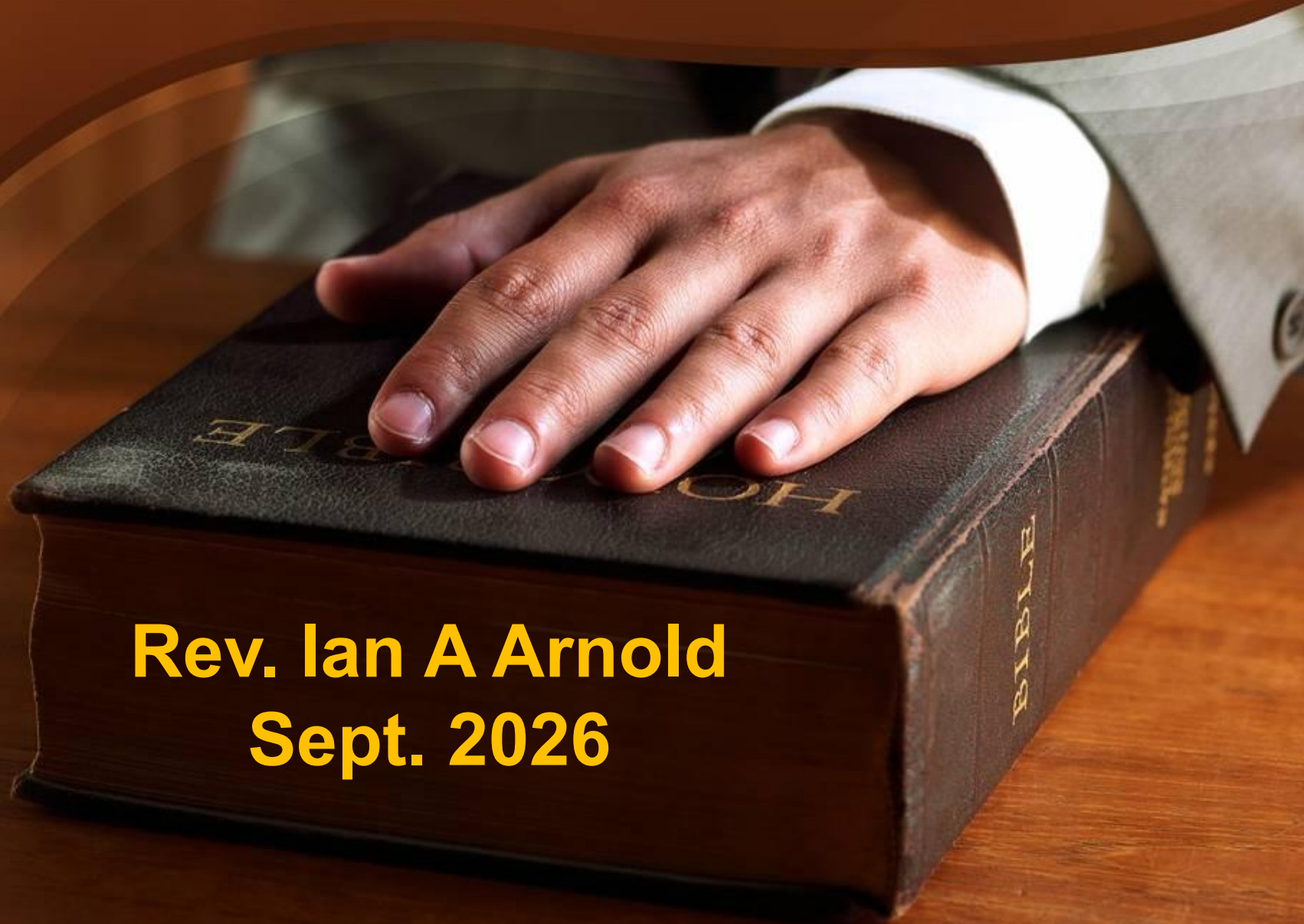


What Unites Heaven and Earth



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Sept. 2026

Please read beforehand:

Genesis Chapter 28: verses 10 to 17

It has been translated into English that what Jacob saw was a ladder; a ladder in the sense of something you climb on to replace a light bulb or paint the ceiling of a room. But this is not what the word in Hebrew means. The word in Hebrew means a pathway along which there are steps as the pathway takes people upwards, perhaps to some lookout over breath-taking scenery. Maybe you have walked such a pathway and remember it well.





What an amazingly re-assuring dream this must have been for Jacob who, at the time, had just left home permanently, facing an unknown future and unsure as he must have been about his safety in unfamiliar country where bandits were a continual threat and wild animals roamed.

In the inner, spiritual, meaning, this dream also carries an amazingly re-assuring message, from God, for us.



This dream, which no doubt Jacob told other people about over his life time, was – under the Lord's Divine Providence – eventually incorporated into the Word.

Firstly, it holds within it the message of the importance of **keeping The Lord as our focus** throughout the journey which life in this world is.

And secondly, it highlights the reality that our journey towards the Lord is a **gradual, step by step**, process. Our first awareness of the Lord, either as a child or as an adult, is one thing. But to come to have Him at the very centre of our lives; a truly living Presence with us; is another. This is all about our becoming a re-born person, as Jesus taught we need to be. (John 3:3). And the pathway along we need to travel lifts us slowly and gradually into a beautifully closer relationship with Him.



At the outset it can seem discouraging. It seems such a long way to go. Maybe, like Jacob, who had acted deceitfully towards his brother and father, and was at the time running away from his bad behaviour, we feel an unworthiness about ourselves. But, once we start, we find it is not too steep and though we may lose sight of the Lord from time to time; and sometimes stumble; or lose our footing and slide backwards; yet **He is always there encouraging us.** And we all need that re-assurance.



Very possibly it is the legacy of a misunderstanding of the apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) that gave rise to the mis-leading idea that people have "arrived", and are fully Christian, when they have accepted Christ as their Saviour. But true conversion is not like that.



On one occasion the twelve disciples of Jesus came to Him and asked Him, “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’” (Matthew 18: 1-3).



Here again we encounter a matter of translation. The word “converted” is a Greek word meaning “to turn around”. What, then, Jesus was saying is that **we need to turn our lives around**. When as yet we are unregenerate the goals we strive after are gold and silver and self-aggrandizement. Jesus calls on us to “turn around” and face a new direction to follow; a direction which leads to **the subordination of self**; a direction which leads to **thoughtfulness and care of those around us**; a direction which leads to us **prioritizing heavenly principles and values as being of greater importance than worldly benefits**.



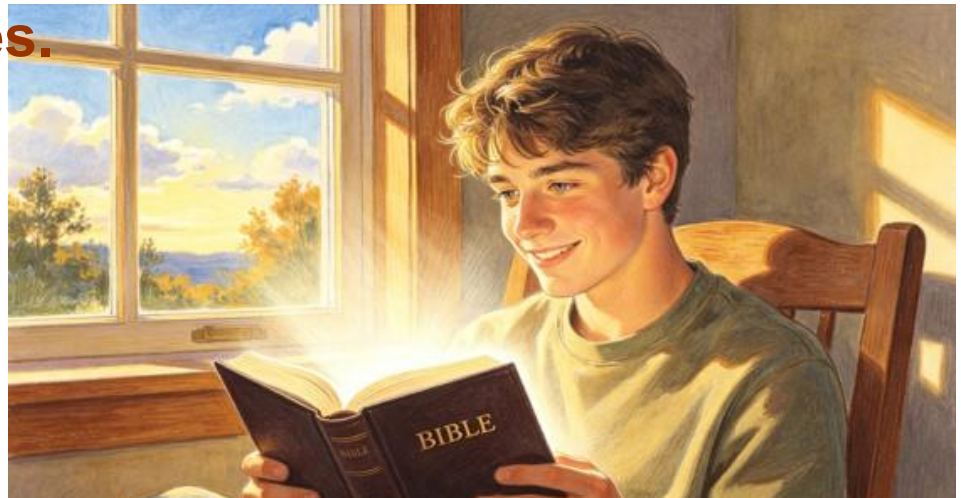
And so the teaching from the Writings: “Our inner and outer levels can by their nature be turned towards the Lord as their common centre, or outward toward ourselves and therefore away from the Lord. The ones that are turned toward the Lord are also turned toward heaven, while the ones that are turned toward ourselves are also turned towards the world; and the ones that are turned in this latter direction are hard to raise up. Still, they are raised by the Lord to the extent that they can be, through the turning of our love; and this is accomplished by means of truth from the Word.” (“Heaven and Hell” 253)

Turning around our lives involves turning around our loves. Who of us hasn't found this to be a challenge? Who of us at times hasn't been discouraged because we seem to be making such little progress? Who of us hasn't experienced times when we stumbled or lost our footing and slid backwards? Who of us hasn't felt the darkness of shameful behaviour swirling



It could be, for example, you have known someone who seems to have been born into a love for praise and flattery; or, they have grown into such a love. And if they choose to do so they will discover that it will take time, gradually and step by step, to turn away from this and **to re-focus their life in a new direction.**

As we have just seen from the Writings, such re-focusing of our lives “is accomplished by means of truths from the Word”. It is not going to be lastingly accomplished by wishful thinking or by externally regulating the way we appear before others .What is involved here is change deep, deep, down within ourselves.

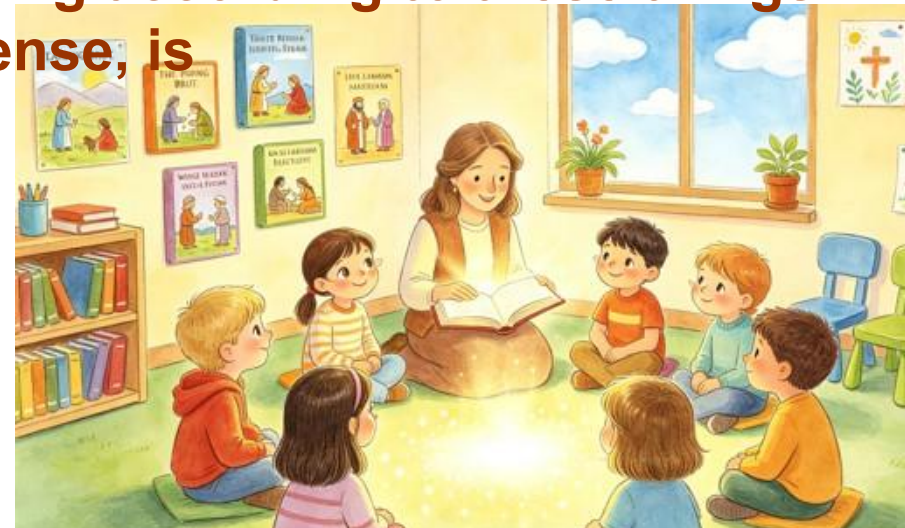


So, where is the starting point?

The answer is here in this story. “Now Jacob”, it is said, “went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran”. The word “Beersheba” means, in Hebrew, “the place of an oath”. It hold the idea of a firm commitment to something. And, in fact, in the spiritual sense, it means **a first, early, commitment**, to what, if only vaguely, we understand from the Word is involved in living a better and less self-centred life.



It is perhaps what we have remembered from the Word, even from our childhood. It can be things we have remembered from what Jesus taught in, for example, what we refer to as His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7). It can be the impressions our first hearing the stories of the prodigal son or of the Good Samaritan have left on us. These remembered things have stayed there in our memories and for some reason, at some point, as a teenager, a young adult, or an older adult, **the Lord has re-directed our attention to them.** And having re-directed our attention to them we make up our minds to commit to living according to these things. This, in the spiritual sense, is to begin our journey along this pathway at Beersheba.



So much, then, with regard to what is meant by the starting point. But the starting point cannot be the destination! As we have just seen, the starting point is us seeing truths externally and being awakened to their value and the promise they hold of a more purposeful and spiritually focused life.

But those truths we see at this beginning need to be filled with the Lord's life flowing in. They are only knowledges at this early stage. But they can be opened up and infilled and blessed by the Lord's life within them.

It is fine to put our external lives and behaviour in order but the challenge remains to put our inner, spiritual, life in order. The Pharisees were renowned for having put their outer life in order. But as Jesus pointed out to them, “you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.” (Matthew 23:25)



As is the teaching in the Writings, “A person who is being regenerated is gradually led away from this more remote or morally correct life to **a life that comes closer to spiritual life.**” (“Arcana Caelestia” 3690)

And the process according to which this happens is taught to be as follows: “To make a person new, knowledges from the Word are instilled into people as are not completely contrary to those they already have - for example, the idea that all love starts with ourselves; that idea that we should consider ourselves first and others only after that; the idea that those people who are outwardly poor and wretched should be helped irrespective of what they are like inwardly.... These and other ideas like them are the knowledges from the Word appropriate to the early childhood of our new (spiritual) life...They are the lowest forms of good and truth. And it is with these that people who are being regenerated start out.” (Arcana Caelestia” 3701:4)



But here is the promise that as we make progress along the pathway that leads to a vibrant, life-changing, relationship with the Lord, these knowledges of truth will be infilled by Him.

The angels, you remember, were seen ascending and descending. And so heaven and earth is at last united within us!



This is a most wonderful promise, that heaven and earth can become united in us. And, when we collectively are involved in this process, wherever we may be around the world, this is what unites heaven and earth. This is something so important to remember. We can all do our part to make it possible for heaven to be united with earth. **We can all do our part to open those doors deep within us** through which, increasingly, heaven can flow through us into the world around us. Maybe you are familiar with this teaching that “the human being was created to be the means through which the Divine is linked to the natural world, and the natural world is linked to the Divine, and in this way through the human being as the means linking the two together.” (“Arcana Caelestia” 3702)



This is wonderful; this is a challenge; this is something we can all do; this is the Lord's call to us. "Prove me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10)

Such a connection with the human race is absolutely vital. It has existed from the time of the earliest people on earth. It has been the role of what in the Writings is designated as "the Church specific". And such Churches have come and gone over the ages.

Jesus spoke of the way the religious authorities had made the Word of no effect through their traditions.(Matthew 15:6). The Word of God had become smothered over by traditions and falsified through false interpretations, and because of this **the connection of heaven with earth was at the point of being broken.**



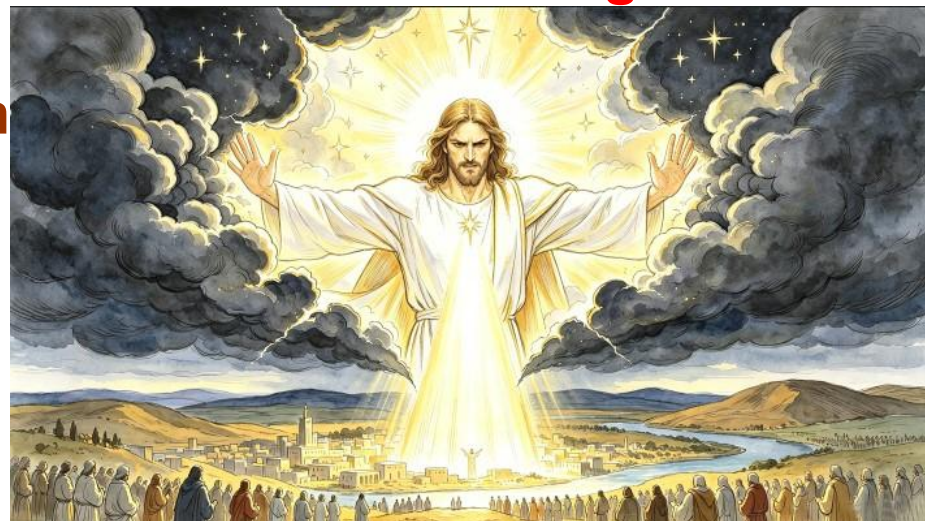
If it had been broken the human race would have felt no restraints and would have rushed into the worst kinds of sin and so destroyed itself. We rightly talk of Jesus as our “Saviour”. He saved us from such a calamity. **While He was in this world He alone was the connecting point between heaven and earth.**

And this is what He was referring to when, speaking to Nathanael at the time, Jesus said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (John 1:51).

His restoring of Divine truth and lifting it up to what it really means was, in this specific sense, the angels of God ascending. And once lifted up they could be infilled with the very Divine life itself. Again, in this specific sense, this is what is meant by the angels of God descending.



Later in His ministry , and talking with His disciples., Jesus said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” (John 12:32). Most Christians understand this to be a reference to His death on the cross. And yes, this is the external meaning. But Jesus was saying so much more! Let’s remember that He was the Word made flesh.(John 1:14) Even as a boy Jesus filled His mind with the truths of the Word. Essentially, these were all that He was interested in studying. And His great challenge was to lift these up on high and so re-unite these with Divine life itself. He needed to **strip those truths of all that had come to obscure their true meaning.** And this is exactly what He did in all His temptation combats.



Just think of the way the devil was misusing Scripture when he was tempting Jesus in the wilderness. (Matthew 4: 6 & 7). And then there were the Pharisees and scribes who had so smothered the real meaning of the Commandment, about honoring our father and mother.(Mark 7:9-13) They had concocted an interpretation of this Commandment which they used to bypass any responsibility towards parents.



These are the truths on which our hope of heaven rests. And these are what Jesus lifted up so that divine life could flow back into them. The connection with heaven and earth was once again restored. As the result of His work on earth the prophecy concerning the coming Messiah was fulfilled, He (Jesus) becoming “the restorer of paths to dwell in”. (Isaiah 58:12)

So, too, it came about some two hundred and fifty years ago, that the smothering of truth with falsity and misinterpretations within the Christian Church, and over many centuries, rendered the Word unable to be the connection with heaven it needs always to be. Hence the reason for the revelation given by God through the Writings, to restore the meaning and clarity and integrity of the truth of the Word., enabling it to once again serve as the effective link between heaven and earth.



All of us are aware of situations where the connection between heaven and earth has been broken. It might be between communities of people. It might be between couples in a marriage. It might be between work colleagues who have come to resent or envy each other. And it might be within ourselves.

The truth we know has come to be disengaged with the way we live our lives. For example, Jesus affirmed the ancient wisdom that we are to act towards others as we would have them act towards us (Matthew 7:12). But how often do we fail to do so?

One of the things we pray in the Lord's Prayer is that God's will be done, as in heaven (as in our inner selves we know it should be) so also on earth, meaning in our daily lives and inter-actions with those around us. But is this happening?



Like we have seen, the re-uniting of heaven and earth is “accomplished by means of the truths of the Word”. **This means taking those truths seriously, taking them to heart, and insisting within ourselves on their relevance to our daily life.**

If the connection between communities of people has been ruptured then re-uniting it will be “accomplished by means of truths from the Word.” If the connection between colleagues at work has been ruptured re-uniting it will be “accomplished by means of truths from the Word”. If the connection between heaven and earth in a marriage has been ruptured then re-uniting it will be “accomplished by means of the truths of the Word”.

And this is not just about knowing, or recalling, these truths. It is about searching more closely for their meaning and relevance to the situation that has arisen in our lives and being prepared to accept the need for change that these truths highlight.



This is the pathway we need to walk, step by step, to make it possible for all that is heavenly to flow back in. This is the pathway we so need to walk along in this world for by so doing this not only connects heaven with the earth, but also it enables us to quickly find the pathway to heaven once we cross over from this world into the next.



“Heaven”, we read, “can only be open to people who know the path to it and follow that path. We can know the path to heaven to some extent simply by considering what the people who make up heaven are like, realizing that **no one can become an angel or get to heaven unless he or she arrives bringing along some angelic quality from the world.”**

Inherent in that angelic quality is a knowing of the path from having walked it and a walking in the path from knowing it.” (“Divine Providence” 60)

As we, by means of the truths of His Word, increasingly known, appreciated and loved, draw closer to God, God is able to draw closer to us and fill our life with the blessings of heaven. (See James 4:8)

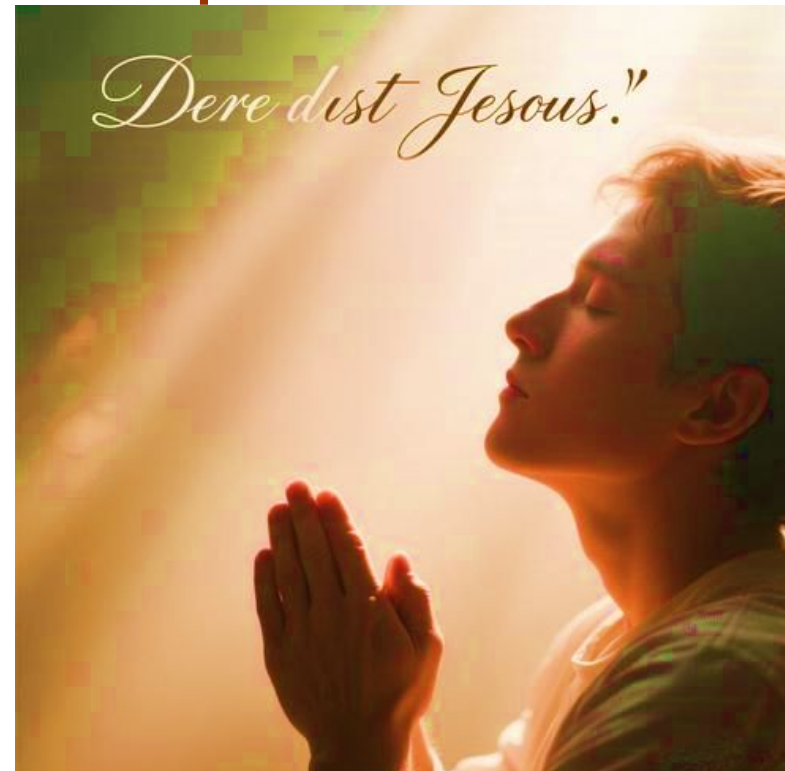


And, now two prayers from the Psalms to finish:

**“Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in the truth and teach me, for You are the God of salvation; on You I wait all the day.”
(Psalm 25:4)**

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.” (Psalm 119:33-35)

AMEN



Readings:

1, John Chapter 3: verses 1 to 15

2, Arcana Caelestia 9152

“The Lord imparts spiritual life to a person through that persons acceptance of the truth of faith within the good if charity....When therefore a member of the Church (meaning, someone who loves the Lord and is committed to following Him) in whom is the good of faith is present reads the Word, and angels attach themselves to that person and take delight in him (or her) because they delight in the wisdom which flows into them from the Lord through the Word. In this way heaven is linked to mankind and without the Word that it would not exist. For the nature of the Word is such that not even a tittle or a jot of it in the original language fails to touch angels’ affections and link the angels to mankind.”



3, Apocalypse Explained 365:4

“In the Word are all the truths of Heaven and the Church, and even all the wisdom possessed by the angels of heaven. But no one sees these except those who are in the good of love to the Lord, and in the good of love towards the neighbour.”



THE END

