

Friday (A Carthusian)

To give that supreme grace of becoming one with that Man to each one of us, God stops at nothing. That is all he wants, all he can want: the whole plan of divine providence is directed to that end. All that happens to us must be regarded in the light of this final end. That is why we all suffer – to become ‘other Christs’; to be Jesus over again, and, like him, misunderstood, persecuted, made to bear our cross. Looked at from any other point of view, suffering would be incomprehensible and intolerable. On the other hand, when we contemplate our divine Example, suffering assumes a beauty which God has permitted here below, just as death is the most living of realities of this life.

Scripture (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ – can hardships or distress, or persecution or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence? No, we come through all these things triumphantly victorious, by the power of him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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11th week of Ordinary Time

Living in hopeful times

Ezekiel’s optimistic and confident prophecy, (17:22-24) looks forward to when God will raise a leader from the House of David (the small shoot taken from the top of the cedar) who will grow tall and provide shelter for every bird, whilst other trees (the surrounding nations) will learn that God is the one who is the real power in the world.

This confidence would be hard for the prophet’s audience to put too much faith in – there was certainly no sign of it being fulfilled in their life time – since they were the ‘lucky’ ones who had survived the massacre in Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and were now in exile.

As Christians, we can see this promise being fulfilled in Jesus, the messiah who came to establish the Kingdom of God, when we read Jesus saying, ‘The Kingdom of God is like...’, not ‘when it comes, the Kingdom will be like’, then we look at the state of the world with all its injustice and suffering, can we confidently say to people ‘don’t worry – God’s Kingdom of peace and justice is here.’? Mark’s original audience suffering a bitter persecution, would certainly find this hard to believe. And yet, Jesus’ ‘The Kingdom of God is like’ parables in Mark 4 are clear that the Kingdom has arrived and is growing. This would be hard for the Jewish people of the time to understand, since they had expected the Messiah to be a powerful leader who would establish God’s Chosen People as the supreme power, i.e. as the tall cedar. Perhaps Jesus could just as well have started his parables with ‘I might as well tell you that the Kingdom of God isn’t going to be like you expect,’ and then go on to make the point that the Kingdom will grow despite anything we do, especially despite rejecting the Messiah so decisively on the cross – the frail branch of the tree planted on the high mountain of Israel, i.e. Jerusalem. The key point of the Parable of the Seed growing by itself is that just as the seed grows because of the power within it, so the Kingdom grows because of the power of God in it. This isn’t to say that we have no part to play: a farmer has to plant the seed, and to weed it, (and this comes just after Jesus pointing out the role of his disciples when he talks about the light not being hidden but put on a stand for all to see), but the growth happens without the farmer knowing how, and even when he isn’t attending. Even in the cross on the hill, even in the persecution, even in the midst of all the bad news, Jesus’ parable urges us not to despair and not to be impatient. – God’s Kingdom is growing. The Parable of the Mustard Seed teaches that the arrival of the Kingdom in the Messiah would be more twig than mighty cedar, (or, as we can now see, carpenter’s son not king’s son), contrary to the expectations at the time. A carpenter’s son who was more concerned with the sick and with preaching, who kept company with all the wrong sort, and rode a donkey rather than being a warrior and powerful ruler certainly didn’t fit the bill, but this is how God has always made his breakthroughs. In the Old Covenant it was always with people who were insignificant: Abraham, as an old man chosen to start the chosen race; Moses as a shepherd was God’s instrument to take on, and defeat, the might of the Pharaoh; the prophet Ezekiel in exile as part of a defeated and dejected remnant. The common factor is that in each case, the chosen people are obedient to God and know that he is the source of their power and authority, thus allowing his seed to grow and the kingdom to flourish. The Kingdom is delayed when people become detached from God; it flourishes when they allow him to work through them. Martin Bennett

Monday (Oscar Romero)

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in one lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that will one day grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold the future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. What we do may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

Scripture (Mark 4: 26-29)

Jesus said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come."

Tuesday(Caryll Houselander)

Christ came to redeem, and he came to show us how to become whole again. There is a startling paradox in this, that he who came, as he said, to give life to all, is known as "the Man of Sorrows." At first sight, one would be tempted to say that he had fallen in love with our suffering. He suffered loneliness, betrayal, injustice, the spurning of his love, utter desolation of spirit, the sense of despair and death. But it was not with our suffering that Christ fell in love with; it was us. The secrets of the healing of suffering and of human fulfilment were told two thousand years ago, by Christ, to the motley crowd of poor, ignorant and suffering people who flocked to hear him speak.

Scripture Ephesians 1:3-5, 7-11)

He chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love, marking us out beforehand to be adopted children, through Jesus Christ. Such is the richness of the grace which he has showered on us in all wisdom and insight. He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ, for him to act upon when the times had run their course: and it is in him that we have received our heritage, marked out beforehand as we were, under the plan of the One who guides all things.

Wednesday (Evelyn Underhill)

We see in this muddled world a constant struggle for Truth, Goodness, Perfection; and all those who give themselves to the struggle for redemption of the world from greed, cruelty, injustice, selfish desire and their results, find themselves supported by a spiritual power. Christianity shows us in the most august of all examples the violence of the clash between evil and the Holiness of God. It insists that the redemption of the world, by the health-giving power of love – bringing in the Kingdom of God – is a spiritual task. Once we realise this, we can accept – even though we cannot understand – the paradox that the world as we know it contains much that is evil; and yet, that its Creator is the one supreme Source and Object of the love that will triumph in the end.

Scripture (1 Corinthians 2: 20-25)

Do you not see how God has shown up human wisdom as folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world was unable to recognise God through wisdom, it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel. While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness, but to those who have been called, a Christ who is both the power and the wisdom of God. God's folly is wiser than human wisdom and God's weakness is stronger than human strength

Thursday(Fr, George Aschenbrenner, SJ. Notes on the Examen)

Only the Holy Spirit can help me to know myself as a son of the Father and a companion of Jesus. Too much attention to our own victories and failures can make us self-absorbed and confirm us in the illusion that we manage our own lives. Examination is a question of examining how I respond to God's loving action in my life. A true awareness of my sinfulness is still a gift granted in love by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I can express sorrow for the ways in which I have failed to respond to his love at work in me. This can lead to wonder at constantly being brought home, joy and gratitude because I share the victory of Christ

Scripture (Luke 1: 68-70)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel! He has visited his people and redeemed them. He has raised up for us a mighty saviour in the house of David his servant, as he promised by the lips of holy men, those who were his prophets from of old. A saviour who would free us from our foes, from the hands of all who hate us. So his love for our fathers is fulfilled and his holy covenant remembered. As for you, little child, you shall be called the Prophet of the Most High, for you shall go before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of all their sins. He will give light to those in darkness, those who dwell in the shadow of death, and guide us into the way of peace.