

## **Friday (Julian of Norwich)**

I saw in truth that God does all things, however small they may be. And I saw that nothing happens by chance, but by the far-sighted wisdom of God. If it seems like chance to us, it is because we are blind and blinkered. The things planned before the world began come upon us suddenly, so that in our blindness we say they are chance. But God knows better. Constantly and lovingly he brings all that happens to its best end. All that is done is well done, for it is done by God.

## **Scripture (Isaiah 45: 1,4-6)**

*Thus says the Lord to his anointed, Cyrus, whom he has taken by his right hand to subdue nations before him and strip the loins of kings, to force gateways before him that their gates be closed no more: It is for the sake of my servant Jacob, of Israel my chosen one, that I have called you by your name, conferring a title though you do not know me. I am the Lord unrivalled; there is no other God besides me. Though you do not know me, I arm you that men may know you from the rising to the setting of the sun that, apart from me, all is nothing.*

A group of us meet to discuss the readings. If you would like detailed notes of the discussion, which included the questions below, please go to [www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk](http://www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk) click on 'prayer' then on 'Thinking outside the pew'

**Q1** How can we know for sure when duty to God clashes with our duty as citizens?

**Q2** Is God present even in evil?

**Q3** When we ask God for help, how do we know what to ask for?

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## **29th Week of Ordinary Time**

### **Keep the Sabbath holy. And the Monday.**

*When Jesus was asked, 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?', at the heart of the question and in the heart of his opponents who had made a temporary and wholly unnatural alliance to trap Jesus there was more at stake than a single moral issue. The essence of the Pharisees was that Jews, as a holy people, must keep pure and separate by keeping the rules and keeping a distance from sinners and gentiles: contact with 'the world' was highly filtered and regulated so as to maintain the right relationship with God. The Herodians, on the other hand, were politically astute Jews who recognised the need to get along with the Romans: they did bring order and did allow them to practice their religion, and, besides, if you annoyed them, they would simply crush you, (as happened to the Temple and Jerusalem a few years later).*

*For Herodians, then, paying tax – acknowledging and supporting the rule of the Romans – would not trouble their conscience but the Pharisees regarded this as an evil: not only was a pagan emperor subjugating God's people, but the coin had the inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, great high priest.' Because of this, if Jesus answered 'Yes, pay the tax,' the Pharisees would accuse him of blasphemy; if he said 'no', the Herodians would accuse him of inciting rebellion, which was treason. Either way, he was wrong.*

*At the heart of the question is 'Do you serve God or the world?' In his answer, Jesus refuses to accept this division. At one level, it is possible to fulfil your duties as a citizen, and if there are any clashes, put God first, (an example would be conscientious objectors in war time).*

*However, Jesus has a deeper awareness that God is present in all things – at his trial he says to Pilate 'You would have no power if it weren't given to you from above'. God's involvement in history, working in history rather than 'from on high' is sometimes obvious, in prophets and other key individuals, but sometimes is not only unexpected but impossible to spot at the time. In Isaiah 45, God promises to deliver his people from exile in (Babylon). He is speaking to his 'anointed one' – another word is 'messiah' – who is Cyrus. This is God working in one of his more mysterious ways: he chooses Cyrus 'though you do not know me', so he is a pagan, (and not a particularly pleasant one). A pagan messiah challenges many of our ideas about who God does and doesn't work with; it also suggests to me that the division between 'religion' and 'the world', the sacred and the profane, is not a division God recognises: he is present in everything and everyone. Jesus' deep sense of this is perhaps most clear on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' is the start of psalm 22, which is the prayer of someone who cannot see where God is, but does not lose faith in his presence.*

*Because of the Incarnation, we know that God works in the world, entering into the suffering and the joys – the whole mess of being human – rather than forming a group which was to keep itself separate from the world. As he works from within our daily lives, I should be asking how my daily life might be being used by God, (the Morning Offering is a particularly good prayer this week). I should also be aware that God is at work in some very surprising people! Keeping holy the Sabbath is important insofar as it keeps holy the rest of the week by not allowing the Pharisee in me to separate God from 'the world.'*

Martin Bennett

## **Monday (A New Catechism)**

Very often, we think we know what God “could have” done or prevented. But God’s omnipotence is more profound, more profoundly different and indescribable than we can comprehend. We must deepen our conviction that we can only really know and meet him in Jesus. His life shows us now how God, in his true omnipotence, fights with sin and suffering, in a different way, more mysterious, fiercer, more involved and more triumphantly than our own ideas of omnipotence could have imagined. Why it was accomplished in this way we do not know. What we do know is that it is a mystery of light and goodness. Faith in Jesus Christ means that we see, to some extent, with the eyes of God.

### **Scripture (John 19:7-11)**

*The Jews said to Pilate “We have a Law, and according to that Law he ought to be put to death, because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” Pilate re-entered the Praetorium. He said to Jesus “Where do you come from?” But Jesus made no answer. Pilate then said to him “Are you refusing to speak to me? Surely you know that I have the power to crucify you?” Jesus replied “You would have no power over me at all if it had not been given you from above.”*

## **Tuesday (Rabindranath Tagore)**

At midnight, the would-be ascetic announced: “This is the time to give up my home and seek for God. Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?” God whispered “I,” but the ears of the man were stopped. With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed. The man said “Who are you that have fooled me so long?” The voice said again, “They are God”, but he heard it not. The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother. God commanded “Stop, fool, leave not your home,” but still he heard not. God sighed and complained “Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?”

### **Scripture (Psalm 139:1-6)**

*Yahweh, you examine me and know me, you know when I sit, when I rise. You understand my thoughts from afar. You watch when I walk or lie down, you know every detail of my conduct. A word is not yet on my tongue before you, Yahweh, know all about it. You fence me in, behind and in front, you have laid your hand upon me. Such amazing knowledge is beyond me, a height to which I cannot attain.*

## **Wednesday (Ignatius of Antioch)**

I have been impressed by the godly qualities of your mind—anchored, as it seemed, to an unshakable rock. You must do justice to your position by showing the greatest diligence both in its temporal and spiritual duties. Spend your time in constant prayer and beg for ever larger gifts of wisdom. The very reason you are given a body as well as a soul is to help you gain the favour of this outward and visible world; though at the same time you must pray for insight into the invisible world as well. Critical times like these need you as the storm-tossed mariner needs a haven, if people are ever to find their way to God.

### **Scripture (Mt. 22:15-21)**

*The Pharisees’ disciples said to Jesus “Master, we know that you are an honest man and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Give us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied “You hypocrites! Why are you putting me to the test? Show me the money you pay the tax with.” They handed him a denarius. “Whose portrait is this?” They replied “Caesar’s.” Then Jesus said to them “Very well, pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar—and God what belongs to God.”*

## **Thursday (Cardinal Basil Hume)**

We are to serve God. How we do this will depend on each one’s personal vocation. One factor is common to all of us. Everything human has a new significance since God became man. It is an idea rich in consequences, for it means that whatever we do looks different to the Father than it does to us. You have that floor to sweep. God sees more than the sweeping. He sees it as a service of him. Your daily work is your daily service of God. To make that service a loving one adds to it, both in giving honour to God and in the joy you will experience.

### **Scripture (Ecclesiasticus 39: 16-20, 33-34)**

*How wonderful the actions of the Lord! Whatever he orders is done at the proper time! At his command, whatever he wants is done, no one can stop him if he intends to save. His gaze stretches from eternity to eternity, and nothing can astonish him. The works of the Lord are all good, when the time is right he gives whatever is needed. You must not say “This is worse than that” for, sooner or later, everything proves its worth.*