

## **Friday (Fr. Richard Rohr)**

All these religious gifts that are given to us are no more than fingers pointing to the moon. Religion endlessly gets involved with the fingers—defining them, proclaiming them, protecting them, fighting about which finger is better, which is going to save you, instead of paying attention to the moon. It's the moon, the goal, that matters, and the goal is God. Pope, Church, sacraments, priesthood, all of these things that we spend ninety per cent of our time worrying about are fingers pointing to the moon. But it's the moon we must see.

### **Scripture (Matthew 23: 8-12)**

***You must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers and sisters. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises themselves up will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be raised up.***

A group of us meet each week to discuss the readings. If you would like to read the notes summarising our discussion, based loosely on the questions below, please go to [www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk](http://www.sthelenscrosby.org.uk), click on 'prayer' and then 'Thinking outside the pew', or email me directly. Comments / suggestions welcome.

**Q1** Is God pleased to accept our Offertory gifts?

**Q2** Should we put priests on a pedestal?

**Q3** Have we fallen into the same trap?

**Q4** Should we call priests 'Father'?

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*31st Sunday of Ordinary Time*

### **Authority: handle with care**

*Whenever a person in authority is exposed as being a poor leader, I am usually confident in saying what they have done wrong and why they are like this. For example, when the priests come in for some heavy and deserved criticism, (Malachi 1:14-2:10), it is easy for me to tut tut and ask, 'how could they do this?' – the obvious implication being that I would be different. They have two main functions - to offer sacrifices and to teach - and they are bad at both, offering blemished sacrifices and leading people astray with their teachings. There is clearly something wrong with their relationship with God: he has to point out to the priests that he is a mighty king, whose name is feared throughout the world, and has shown his majesty throughout history, yet to them, God seems to have become little more than an inconvenience, judging by their weary comment, "How tiresome this all is!" and their 'sniffing disdainfully' at God, (v13). They have fallen a long way since their priestly tradition was established in the covenant with Levi. Of course, I assure myself, I don't have this attitude towards God, but I'm not sure I would be any different in their position of authority. They were in powerful and privileged positions, and will therefore be treated with honour and respect by 'ordinary' people. The trouble is, they take all this to themselves, rather than remembering that the praise and honour belongs to God. I recognise this in myself: I'm fairly good at passing the blame whenever I make a mistake, but I'm not nearly so quick to pass the credit when something goes well!*

*This is at the heart of Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees who clearly enjoy the trappings of authority, taking to themselves the glory and honour which should go to God, (Matthew 23:1-12). Perhaps the cause of the problem is more subtle than loving power and prestige. They are in a position of great responsibility because they are teaching the Law of Moses so, as Jesus says, people should listen to them and obey them. Conscious of the importance of what they are responsible for, it would be reasonable for them to have titles and visible signs that ensured people respected their teachings. After all, in our society, few parents allow their children to call them by their first name; teachers doctors, police etc. are all addressed by title to avoid the problems of familiarity, which would lead to a loss of authority and so lessen the respect for the role or teachings.*

*The danger is that the teacher gradually replaces the teachings at the centre. To avoid this, Jesus specifically forbids his followers to accept any titles which were common in the various 'schools' at the time. Each elevated the person and so obscured God: Rabbi was used in the sense of 'master' but God is master of all and all are equal under him; 'father' was adopted by leaders who wanted to emphasise their authority, but only God is our Father; 'teachers' collected disciples around them, but we are disciples only of Jesus. If they were to accept a title, even though it will be for good reasons, they begin to move God out; by refusing to accept any title, Jesus' disciples would always have God as the authority always point other people to him.*

*The same call, and the same pitfalls, apply equally to us since, by our baptism, each of us are part of a priestly people, (as the Catechism teaches). When we hear the weekly commission to 'announce the Gospel with your life,' we are not superior to anyone, nor are we to simply tell people how to lead their lives. Washing feet, not laying burdens (being superior) was the attitude recommended by Jesus.     **Martin Bennett.***

### **Monday (Thomas a Kempis)**

Everybody wants to know, but what is the good of knowledge without fear of God? Indeed, a humble servant who serves God is better than a proud philosopher who ponders the course of the sky but neglects himself. The greater and better the knowledge, so much more severely will you be judged, unless you have lived a more holy life. Do not therefore be lifted up for any skill or learning, but rather fear for the knowledge that has been given you.

### **Scripture (John 13:12-16)**

*When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer garment, again he went back to the table. "Do you understand" he said "what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him."*

### **Tuesday (C.S.Lewis)**

I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. I am not forgetting how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please, turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment during which the satisfaction of having pleased was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to when we learn at last that we have pleased Him whom we were created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. We will be free from the miserable illusion that it was our doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval we will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has meant us to be

### **Scripture (Luke 17:7-10)**

*Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal at once"? Would you not be more likely to say "Get my supper ready; fasten your belt and wait on me while I eat and drink. You yourself can eat and drink afterwards"? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say "we are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty."*

### **Wednesday (Meister Eckhart)**

We should rest content with nothing, however good it may seem to be, so that we may learn to enter into a relationship of cooperation with God. We should not neglect or deny our inner self but we should learn to work precisely in it, with it and from it in such a way that our inner reflections turn into effective action and effective action leads back to inner reflections. For we should concentrate on this inner prompting, and act from it, whether through reading or praying or some form of external activity. Though if the external activity destroys the internal one, we should give priority to the latter. But if both are united as one, then that is best for cooperating with God.

### **Scripture (Galatians 5:13-14,16,24-25)**

*You were called to be free; do not use your freedom as an opening for self-indulgence, but be servants to one another in love, since the whole of the Law is summarised in the one commandment: You must love your neighbour as yourself. Be guided by the Spirit and you will no longer yield to self-indulgence. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us be guided by the Spirit and let us not be conceited or provocative and envious of one another.*

### **Thursday (William of St. Thierry)**

As long as I am with you, I am present to myself; I am not wholly me when I am not with you. Woe to me every time I am not with you, without whom I cannot even be. I should not be able to subsist in any way at all, either in body or soul, without the indwelling of your power. Were it not for the presence of your grace in me, I should neither seek nor deny you; nor should I ever find you unless your mercy and goodness came to me. But when in these ways I am with you, I feel your grace at work within me, and then I am glad I am, and am alive.

### **Scripture (1 Chronicles 16:23-29)**

*Sing to Yahweh, all the earth, day after day proclaim his salvation! Declare his glory among the nations, his marvels to every people! Great is Yahweh, worthy of all praise. Yahweh it was who made the heavens, in his presence are splendour and majesty, in his sanctuary splendour and joy. Give Yahweh his due, families of peoples, give Yahweh his due of glory and power, give Yahweh the glory due to his name!*