

Friday (A New Catechism)

God's omnipresence is not the homogenous filling of the height and width of the universe, but fellowship with our love and suffering. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When we try to penetrate this mystery prayerfully, we begin to realise that our whole life is in the hands of an eternal love. Being brought to the Father by Jesus and filled with their Holy Spirit, we are perpetually involved in a mystery of love. Since we are privileged to be the family of God, the most magnificent glory is revealed to us.

Scripture (John 10:11-18)

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and I must lead these too. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, one shepherd. The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have the power to lay it down, so I have the power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.

"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day" **Pope Francis**

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4th Week of Easter

Knowing now who the apostles knew then

The implications of the Resurrection continue to unfold in ways which allow Christians to make claims that seem either arrogant or delusional to those who are looking from the outside. These reactions aren't new – they date right back to the apostles and the early Church – but how seriously do we believe and take up what is on offer?

The imagery of us as sheep responding to the call of Jesus as the good (ideal) shepherd has nothing to do with us being herded, nor of us blindly following 'like sheep': a shepherd in Jesus' time used to corral his flock with other flocks at night and in the morning would call out. His sheep knew him and recognised his voice, so would follow him. Out in the wild, he would protect them from danger, e.g. wolves, and would take them to where good grazing was to be found. It is this relationship – he knows the sheep and the sheep know him – that Jesus is describing, (John 10:11-18) when he is talking about how his followers respond to his call, but he is going much deeper than a simple familiarity. He is saying that his relationship between him and his followers, (that's you and me) is the same as the deeply intimate and powerful relationship between him and his Father, (so it is not likely to mean he will lead his sheep to some quiet idyllic pasture.) The power of the relationship is shown when Peter and John cure the lame man in the Temple, (Acts 3). As he explains to the Sanhedrin, 'It is by the name of Jesus Christ, the one you crucified and God raised'. Acting in the name is not simply referring to Jesus, but acting with his power: Jesus had promised this powerful relationship: 'I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and so that I may be in them.' (Jn. 17:26). To put it another way, Peter is 'filled with the Holy Spirit' – he knows Jesus.

'Outsiders' who regard religion as an opiate, or 'insiders' who think Christianity is a private 'me and Jesus' affair that somehow offers security and the 'I'm alright Jack' approach to life both show little understanding of this powerful, intimate relationship with God. At this stage of Acts, (4:8-12), there are many converts – people who listen to the voice of the shepherd in Peter and the Spirit-filled disciples – but it is also the point where the persecutions are about to start. The presence of the risen Jesus, acting in the disciples, forces all people to choose. They either reject it through lack of belief, (as the leaders did) or they welcome it as the Good news and live accordingly. Ignoring it is not an option, as Peter makes clear when he says the stone which they, the builders, rejected has become the cornerstone, i.e. the one which all other stones are aligned with: something new is being built and the leaders must accept it or crush it.

I John 3:1-2 predicts that 'the world' will reject the children of God, just as it rejected God. As children of God, made so by the love he has lavished on us, we might once again be tempted to a religion which is rather tepid – allowing God as Father to do everything and wanting his protection, but the imagery of us as children points out that we are only at the start, but that we belong to him, (his Kingdom), not to 'the world'. It also means sharing in 'the family business' of building the Kingdom he began. This means listening to and following his voice as he calls us each day, in the midst of all the other voices. As with the early disciples, this call to discipleship is not to use Jesus as a role model or a case of remembering his teachings and living by his rules: it is to live in communion with him; it is to know him.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Thomas Merton)

To live “in Christ” is to live in a mystery equal to that of the Incarnation and similar to it. For as Christ unites in His one person the two natures of God and man, so too in making us His friends He dwells in us, uniting us intimately to Himself. From the moment we have responded by faith and charity to His love for us, a supernatural union of our souls with His indwelling Divine Person gives us a participation in His Divine sonship and nature. A “new being” is brought into existence. I become a “new man” and this new man, spiritually and mystically one identity, is at once Christ and myself.

Scripture (Romans 8:14-17)

All who are guided by the Spirit of God are children of God; for what you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out “Abba, Father!” The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, providing that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory.

Tuesday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

The first disciples lived in the bodily presence and communion of Jesus. In what manner is that communion and fellowship still possible for us today? St. Paul tells us that we are made members of the Body of Christ through Baptism. The baptised can still live in bodily presence and enjoy communion with him. So far from impoverishing them his departure brings a new gift. Our communion with him is richer and more assured than it was for the first disciples, for the communion and presence we have is with the glorified Lord. In the Body of Christ we are caught up into eternity by the act of God.

Scripture (Eph. 2:19-22)

So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God’s household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Every structure knit together in Him grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and you, too, in him, are being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Wednesday (Fr. Richard Rohr)

To be able to experience ourselves as givers of energy, we have somehow to know ourselves as God (here you find a thin line between truth and illusion!). We have to know who we belong to, we have to believe in the divine indwelling. Prayer itself is God. It is not something I do for God; prayer is God in me loving God outside of me, and God outside of me loving God inside me.

Scripture (1John 4:16-18)

We have recognised for ourselves, and put our faith in, the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. Love comes to perfection in us when we face the Day of Judgement fearlessly, because even in this world we have become as he is.

Thursday (Brother Lawrence)

As Brother Lawrence had found such comfort and blessing in walking in the presence of God, it was natural for him to recommend it earnestly to others; but his example was a stronger inducement than any arguments he could use. It was noticed that in the greatest hurry of business in the kitchen, he still preserved his recollection and heavenly-mindedness. “The time of business” he said “does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.

Scripture (John 14:16-20)

I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth whom the world can never accept since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I shall not leave you orphans; I shall come to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see that I live and you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.