

Friday (Henri Nouwen)

Spiritual formation is a call to discipleship, a call to follow Jesus radically and so become his true brothers and sisters – sons and daughters of God. Having found our true home in God, we can live in the world without becoming subject to its obsessions, compulsions, and addictions. Discipleship, however, calls for discipline. Discipline without discipleship leads to formalism, discipleship without discipline ends in sentimental romanticism. It requires an enormous human effort to be and stay in the world with its many demands while keeping our hearts and minds solidly anchored in God. The various disciplines of the spiritual life are meant for freedom and are reliable means for the creation of helpful boundaries in our lives within which God's voice can be heard, God's presence felt, and God's guidance be experienced. Without such boundaries that make space for God, our lives quickly narrow down; we see and hear less and less, we become spiritually sick, and we become one-dimensional, and sometimes delusional, people. The only remedy for this is the intentional practice of prayer and meditation.

Scripture (Key moments in Mark where prayer is essential for Jesus)

'At once, the Spirit drove him into the desert' (After his Baptism); **'In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.'** (After curing many people into the night); **'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest a while'** (after the apostles had returned full of success from their mission,); **Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own, by themselves,** (after the 1st prophecy of his Passion,); **'Stay here while I pray'** (after the Last Supper, before he is arrested.)

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10th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Like any sin, Original Sin came with Original Forgiveness

I grew up with the idea of an angry God punishing Adam and Eve excessively for one act of disobedience – excessively punishing, given that everyone (including me!) was tainted. I no longer believe this is what the writers of Genesis meant to convey. Like with any written text, I can read the words in different tones: God's 'Where are you?' could be the worried words of one who is missing his two people. The 'Have you eaten of the tree I forbade you' might be a sad 'Oh, please tell me you haven't eaten from that tree'. (Gen 3:9-15). What of the banishment to a life of enmity and struggle? In the carefully written story, things had gone wrong before God had found them hiding: shame had come in as a result of their actions, not as a result of God saying 'right, I'll show you.' Also, being frightened of God came even before he had spoken. Adam and Eve had been able to walk and talk with God but didn't listen (the meaning of 'disobey'). God now points out, rather than inflicting, the consequences: disharmony between humans and nature, between man and woman, and between humans and God.

But that isn't the end! The long-term plan is for reconciliation, when the serpent is defeated (trodden underfoot) by a descendant of Eve. As Christians, we can interpret this as the coming of Christ.

In Mark 3:20-35, Jesus makes two things abundantly clear. Firstly, 'committing sins' – any sins, except one – will never drive God away from us. Secondly, if we block him out, (by refusing to believe in Jesus and so not allowing him to work), he can't do anything to help. If I'm not to make the same mistakes, it's important for me to understand why it was so difficult for the people who met Jesus to see him as being from God and so block him out.

There is some logic to why the very knowledgeable and religious Scribes saw Jesus as evil. He had shown more than human powers in performing miracles and exorcisms. However, he mixed with sinners and had broken God's Sabbath commandment, so he couldn't be from God. Therefore, his power must be from the devil. They were certain about God, and Jesus didn't act how God would. he was blocked out because they were too certain of their beliefs.

His family, meanwhile, knew Jesus, and they knew he was much changed from the brother who had grown up with them for thirty years. They knew him as a carpenter and a brother, and they knew that God didn't work through people like them. The most logical explanation was that he was 'out of his mind'. He was blocked out because they couldn't let him be other than they knew.

In these passages, we have three ways of blocking out God, of not listening or seeing the ways he acts. He's here, and he's active – but our eyes have to be opened to see his presence. This is grace, allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely in us, and freeing us to respond.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium)

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. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realise that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you.” How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. (167 words)

Scripture (Psalm 129)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, Lord, hear my voice! O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you. My soul is waiting on the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than the watchman for daybreak. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fulness of redemption.

Tuesday (St. Hilary)

Whenever scripture speaks of the fear of the Lord, it is never mentioned on its own, as if fear by itself could bring faith to perfection. We see how many steps we must climb to come to fear the Lord. We must seek wisdom out and track her down. Then we shall understand what it is to fear the Lord. Certainly, this is not how people ordinarily think about fear.

Fear is the trembling of human weakness frightened of suffering what we do not want to happen to us. This fear is caused in us and stirred by our consciousness of guilt, or by the power of one stronger than ourselves. But of the true fear of God we read, ‘Come, O children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord.’

All our fear of God is inspired by love; perfect love of God makes fear perfect. We show our love of God especially when we follow his advice, conform to his laws, and trust in his promises.

Scripture (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you? Only this: to fear the Lord your God, to follow his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, to keep the commandments and laws of the Lord, which I am laying down for you today for your own good.

Wednesday (Fr. Daniel O’Leary, ‘An Astonishing Secret’)

You may be wondering if I’m really saying that we, sinful human beings, are, in fact already quite divine and, moreover, are happily on our way to becoming as God’s own self. And I am. Let me explain. Unlike our Eastern Orthodox sisters and brothers, we in the west are somewhat unfamiliar with a most beautiful doctrine called *‘theosis’*, or the deification and divinisation of humanity. Yet it is central to our whole lives, our birth and baptism, our belonging to the Catholic Christian community, our understanding of Creation and Incarnation. St Athanasius of Alexandria summed it up when he wrote, ‘God became human that we might become God.’ And the Catechism affirms the Incarnational basis of this neglected teaching ‘The word became flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature’. We are all predestined by God for this astonishing transition, transformation and transfiguration. For that we were born. It is simply our salvation our completion in full bloom, the natural culmination of our life in Christ.

Scripture (John 14:15-17, 20-21, 23)

If you love me you will keep my commandments. 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. On that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love them and we shall come to them and make a home in them.

Thursday (John Main, OSB)

The gospel is not obsessed with right and wrong beliefs or with a religious law. Instead, it uncompromisingly presents the directly personal truth of its message. The message is the *person* of Jesus and all that his person contains. Jesus does not call us to *believe* or to *do* but to *be*. That is faith, the courageous commitment to be ourselves. Then we become fit for all doing, and for believing in the right way. Faith is the invisible but realistic way of being ourselves that allows us to share in the mystery of Christ’s life, work and self-communication. As a *way of life* faith is a power to heal, forgive and enlighten. (113)

Scripture (Mark 3: 22-24,28-30)

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘Beelzebul is in him,’ and, ‘It is through the prince of devils that he drives devils out.’ and spoke to them in parables, ‘How can Satan drive out Satan?’

‘In truth I tell you, all human sins will be forgiven, and all the blasphemies ever uttered; but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin.’ This was because they were saying, ‘There is an unclean spirit in him.’