

## **Friday (Evelyn Underhill)**

The spiritual life requires a definite plan of life: and courage in sticking to the plan, not merely for days or weeks, but for years. New mental and emotional habits must be formed, all our interests re-arranged in new proportion round a new centre. This is something which cannot be hurried; but unless we take it seriously, can be infinitely delayed. Many people suggest by their behaviour that God is of far less importance than their morning paper or early cup of tea. The life of co-operation with Him must begin with a full and practical acceptance of the truth that God alone matters. We must be prepared for the fact that even on small and personal levels this will cost a good deal; frequently thwarting our inclinations and demanding real sacrifice.

## **Scripture Isaiah 50:4-7)**

*The Lord has given me a disciples tongue, for me to know how to give a word of comfort to the weary. Morning by morning he makes my ear alert to listen like a disciple. The Lord has opened my ear, and I have not resisted, I have not turned away.*

martben1@btinternet.com

24th week of Ordinary Time

### ***Discipleship step 1: listen without interrupting.***

*When Jesus asked, 'Who do you say I am?', it's difficult for us to realise how big a step it was for Peter to answer, 'You are the Christ'. (Mark 8:27-35). Part of me thinks, 'surely the cures, the walking on water, the feeding of the 5,000 etc were fairly obvious signs?'. Many people had recognised in Jesus not just that he was a prophet, but that he was a prophet associated with the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. Until this moment, though, nobody had recognised in the carpenter's son from Nazareth the fulfilment of God's promises. For Peter to recognise that Jesus wasn't the 'warm up man' but was the long-awaited Messiah, he had to lose all the teachings and the expectations he had grown up and lived with – expectations of a figure who would bring in God's reign with power and establish God's people as rulers.*

*This breakthrough moment is a turning point in the Gospel. Having reached this point, Peter and the disciples had only reached base camp; now they had to begin to learn how Jesus would fulfil his role, and the implications of this for the disciples. As we profess that Jesus is Son of God / Messiah, this is the point where we join Peter, so we too must listen carefully and openly to his talk that he must suffer, be rejected, die and rise after three days. We have the advantage of knowing Easter Sunday after Good Friday, but this would have been incomprehensible to the disciples: resurrection took place at the end of time – three days signifies a time of completion and isn't to be taken literally – so this would mean that Jesus was talking of failure (to establish God's reign on earth). Surely Peter was right to argue with Jesus – not just as a friend, promising to stand by him but, more importantly, by saying 'you shouldn't talk of failure'? But for his troubles, Peter becomes Satan!*

*Since he was rejecting the path Jesus mapped out, Peter was being an obstacle to God's plan (as Satan had attempted in the desert.). I think a reasonable question is, 'Why all the suffering?'. In bringing in God's reign, Jesus was to give sight to the blind, make the lame walk, to shepherd the lost sheep and bind up wounds – all images to describe liberation from darkness and the reign of sin. The path chosen is not to fight power with power, but to identify with the suffering, to enter into their lives and to establish God's reign of love. In doing this, Jesus is taking the part of the Suffering Servant, (Isaiah 50:4-9). God opens the ear of the servant to listen; for his part, he listens without resistance, i.e. obeys and takes the path which God directs him along. The spitting and mocking is a sign that people reject the servant, as they would Jesus on the cross, but by relying on God, rather than human ways, the blows, the spittle and the rejection will not deflect the disciple. Somehow, through listening, the Servant will know that God is with him and that this is the path. (I don't think this means the servant will understand how.) The first step on the road to discipleship, then, is passive. Two of the best examples are Mary at the Annunciation ('Be it done unto me') and Jesus in Gethsemane, ('Not my will but yours'). It is this renouncing of self - listening without resistance – which Jesus demanded of Peter when they tried to deflect him from the path of obedience he had learned in the desert. By far the most important advice regarding prayer I have ever had and which I can now look back on as a significant turning point was given to me by Fr. Gerry J. Hughes, SJ, "You are doing all the talking; you need to shut up and let God get a word in." I'm still trying to do that consistently!*

Martin Bennett

## **Monday (John Henry Newman)**

Christ takes you at your word, so to speak; he offers to make you different. He says, "I will take away from you your heart of stone, the love of this world and its pleasures, if you will submit to my discipline." Here we draw back; No; we cannot bear to *lose* the love of the world, to part with our present desires and tastes; we cannot *consent* to be changed. After all, we are well satisfied at the bottom of our hearts to remain as we are, only we want our conscience taken out of the way.

### **Scripture (John 21:18)**

*Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him a third time, 'Do you love me?' and said 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him 'Feed my sheep. In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will take you where you would rather not go.' In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'*

## **Tuesday (Cardinal Basil Hume)**

Humility is central to the Christian life; it is facing the truth about who God is, and the truth of who I am. Humility in another is a very beautiful thing to see; but the attempt to become humble is painful indeed. It hurts to be criticised, to be misunderstood, to be written off. None of us enjoys walking that way. Our Lord must have felt like this at the end of his life. Everybody had turned against him. They were going to execute him; they were insulting him. We know that this moment of failure was God's moment of success. Oddly enough, I believe that for some of us it is when we realise how little we are regarded by others that we begin to realise how highly we are esteemed by God. Whenever I feel inadequate or a failure, God can enter into my life and bring his success.

### **Scripture (Ps. 119: 85, 92-96)**

*The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me in defiance of your Law. True to your faithful love, give me life, and I shall keep the instructions you have laid down. Had your Law not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery. I shall never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. I am yours, save me, for I seek your precepts, for by them you have given me life. I am yours, save me, for I seek your precepts. The wicked may hope to destroy me, but all my thoughts of your instructions. I have seen that all perfection is finite, but your commandment has no limit.*

## **Wednesday (Henri Nouwen)**

In answer to Jesus' question "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?", it is not easy to distinguish between doing what we are called to do and doing what we want to do. True action leads us to the fulfilment of our vocation. Whatever our position in life, the question is not "What do I most want?" but "What is my vocation?". The most prestigious position in society can be an expression of obedience to our call as well as a sign of our refusal to hear that call, and the least prestigious position, too, can be a response to our vocation as well as a way to avoid it. If our actions flow from our call, we are in fact drinking our cup, bit by bit. The sorrows of our lives will no longer paralyze us, nor will our joys make us lose our perspective.

### **Scripture (1 John 2:3-6)**

*In this way we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him' without keeping his commandments, is a liar and truth has no place in him. But anyone who does obey what he has said, in such a one God's love truly reaches its perfection. We can be sure that we are one in God only when the one who claims to be living in him is living the same kind of life that Christ lived.*

## **Thursday (Letters from a Russian monk)**

St. Anthony said: 'When I was visiting an abbot, a virgin came to the old man and said "Abba, I spend my life fasting; I eat once a week and study the Old and New Testaments every day." The old man answered "Have poverty and plenty become a matter of indifference to you?" "No", she said. "Disgrace and praise?" "No", she said. "Enemies and friends?" "No", she said. Then the old man said "Go and work, you have achieved nothing." She had studied the Holy Scripture, but had not understood the essence of what it taught.

### **Scripture (Mark 8:31-35)**

*Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days rise again. And he said all this quite openly. The, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said 'Get behind me, Satan! You're not thinking as God thinks, but as human beings do. He called his disciples and the people to him and said 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.'*