

## **Friday (Mechthild of Magdeburg)**

If you love the justice of Jesus Christ more than you fear human judgment then you will seek to be compassionate. Compassion means if I see my friend and enemy in equal need, I shall help both equally. Justice demands that we seek and find the stranger, the broken, the prisoner, and comfort them and offer them our help. Here lies the holy compassion of God that causes the devil much distress.

## **Scripture (Nehemiah 8:1,8-10,12)**

*All the people gathered as one and asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the Law of Moses which Yahweh had prescribed for Israel. Ezra read from the book from dawn till noon, translating and giving the sense, so the reading was understood. Then Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites who were instructing the people said 'Today is sacred to Yahweh your God. Do not be mournful, do not weep.' For the people were all in tears as they listened to the words of the Law. He then said 'You may go; eat what is rich, drink what is sweet and send a helping to the one who has nothing prepared. For today is sacred to our Lord.' Then all the people went off to eat and drink and give helpings away and enjoy themselves to the full, since they had understood the meaning of what had been proclaimed to them.*

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## **3rd Week of Ordinary Time**

### **Rejoicing in the freedom and vision of God's Law**

*Ezra's reading of the whole Law (the first five books of the Bible) from early morning to noon, (Nehemiah 8:2-10), might be seen as 'pushing it' to congregations in the western world who have pretty fixed ideas about the ideal length of a sermon. The real challenge to me, though, goes deeper than the time devoted to listening to God; it's the fact that they were 'moved to tears.' Do I allow Scripture (and therefore God) to penetrate so deeply? More to the point, do I want to?*

*The gathering was not a regular service; it was all of the people, (470, 360 men, plus women, children old enough to listen and slaves) who had recently returned after exile and were now about to start afresh in the rebuilt Jerusalem. There must have been a sense of excitement and optimism, so it's worth wondering how this became tears. It might have been a sense of guilt or shame, (part of the Law includes the history of what God had done for them and how they had often turned away), but my hunch is that it was the sheer weight of the Law – reading even part of Leviticus and Deuteronomy would leave you in no doubt that there are many do's and don'ts, regulating every aspect of worship and daily life, and therefore of the type of society they would build. Then Ezra orders them to be happy, to go and party because 'this day is sacred to the Lord.' Linking dedicating your life to celebration suggests that the Law is not a burden imposed by a demanding God but a Covenant that allows them to live in harmony with each other and with God.*

*The audience in the synagogue, (Luke 4:14-21) also gather in eager anticipation to hear Jesus. In saying that the words of Isaiah are being fulfilled even as they listen, Jesus is teaching that in him God's promises are being fulfilled. It's reasonable to ask what exactly the 'good news' for the poor, the blind and the captives is – and to ask is it equally good news for the rich and the ones doing the treading? The 'Lord's year of favour' is a Jubilee year in which the debts are cancelled, and land taken from the poor reverts to them. In other words, Jesus is not preaching some vague 'spiritual' message; he has come to re-establish a society living in God's way, (the Kingdom of God). At first, this sounds like it can only be a threat to the rich and powerful, (and the reaction seen in Herod's massacre of the innocence and the authorities' condemning of Jesus to the cross leaves no doubt what a threat Jesus was), but it doesn't have to be. The rich and powerful are also blind and captives in that they are limited by fears, pride, over-dependence on security etc. People (authority and ordinary) were also crippled by the over-emphasis on the need to keep all the rules and customs as a requirement to be acceptable to God. The good news that Jesus proclaims affects, firstly, the relationship with God. It is to be built on God's love for his people, not fear or 'earning' his favour. It is also to be built on love of neighbour, which will change the very structure of society which allows people to be left behind and condemned as worthless. As we know from Jesus' teachings and his choosing to be the servant messiah rather than the expected 'warrior' messiah, this is not a 'taking'; it is by invitation, reaching a new understanding of what leads to a full life.*

*This doesn't just challenge the materialistic approach to life that promises happiness from wealth and prestige, and the society which is built on this individualism, it offers a greater vision and liberates us from it.*

Martin Bennett

## **Monday (Oscar Romero)**

It is very easy to be servants of the word without disturbing the world: a very spiritualised word, a word without any commitment to history. What marks the genuine church is the word that, burning like the word of the prophets, proclaims to the people God's wonders to be believed and venerated, and accuses of sin those who oppose God's reign, so that they may tear that sin out of their hearts, out of their societies, out of their laws. God's spirit goes with the prophet, the preacher, who keeps on proclaiming his reign to the people of all times.

## **Scripture ( Luke 4:16-22)**

*Jesus came to Nazara, where he has been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today, even while you are listening.'*

## **Tuesday (Martin Luther King)**

We must work passionately and indefatigably to bridge the gulf between our scientific progress and our moral progress. One of the great problems of mankind is that we suffer from a poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. Everybody lives in two realms, the internal (the realm of spiritual ends) and external (the various means by which we live). Our problem today is that we have allowed the internal to be lost in the external. We have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live.

## **Scripture (Isaiah 42:5-7)**

*Thus says God, Yahweh, who created the heavens and spread them out, who hammered into shape the earth and what comes from it, who gave breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it: I, Yahweh, have called you to serve the cause of justice, I have grasped you by the hand and shaped you; I have made you a covenant of the people and light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon.*

## **Wednesday (Dorothy Day)**

Together with the works of mercy, feeding, clothing and sheltering our brothers, we must teach. We must give reason for the faith that is in us. Otherwise we are scattered members of the body of Christ and our religion is an opiate, for ourselves alone, for our comfort or for our individual safety or indifferent custom. And if we lose the vision, we become merely philanthropists, doling out palliatives. We are trying to say with action "Thy will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven." We believe in the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, the Mystical Body of Christ. Through all the means of improving life for the poor that we can live as though we believed indeed that we are all members of one another.

## **Scripture (1Cor. 11:17, 20-22)**

*I cannot congratulate you on the meetings you hold; they do more harm than good. When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat; for when the eating begins, each one of you has their own supper first, and there is one going hungry while another is getting drunk. Have you such disregard for God's assembly that you can put shame on those who have nothing? On this I cannot congratulate you.*

## **Thursday (Fr. Austin Smith, CP)**

My Christian tradition mediates God to me and mediates a new format of relationships with the world. The social relationships which create the world in which I live, the human quest of which I am a part and the culture to which I belong, are in themselves a mediation of God. The breakdown in society must first be located in humanity itself to honour its own dignity and its search for fulfilment. Society has ceased to understand what it is to be truly human. If the Church is to address such a society realistically it must see the world and the human quest as bearers of the mediations of God. In other words, we must recognise and identify God in the struggles and the human quest for fulfilment.

## **Scripture (Acts 2:42-47)**

*They remained faithful to the teachings of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. Each day, with one heart, they regularly went to the Temple, but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone.*