

Friday (Bede Griffiths)

We do not overcome darkness by fighting it but simply by bringing it into the light. All the weaknesses we find in ourselves, and all the things that upset us, we tend to try to push aside and get rid of. But we cannot do this. We have to accept that 'this is me' and allow grace to come and heal it all.

Scripture (Luke 1:76-79)

And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before God to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins, because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising of the Sun has come down from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and to guide our feet in the way of peace.

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The Baptism of the Lord

Today, we welcome into our Church – God.

The question the people in the Liverpool Diocese are exploring in the year ahead is 'What sort of Church does God want us to be?' I hope this doesn't settle too quickly on 'What must we do?' or, as no doubt some people may quickly focus on, 'What must we not do?'. Before we ask those questions, we should ask 'What is God up to?'

If we start with Isaiah 42:1-7, we find the answer – he wants to bring true justice to all nations, i.e. to establish his rule in the world so that life will be based on his Love and his Laws – and we also find the 'how': by means of his servant, whose way of bringing God's plans to fulfilment tells us more about the sort of God he is.

The phrase, 'he will not waver or be crushed', shows there will be opposition and temptations, but the servant won't crush or sweep aside the opposition, nor will he be deflected from his plans; he will have the strength to remain faithful to his mission. He won't 'shout aloud' says he won't be a domineering leader who will force obedience. Instead, he will be the light liberating people from the darkness imposed by those who do not live by the Covenant.

The people who had been baptised by John the Baptist were also in an excited state, thinking that the powerful speaking John was perhaps the long awaited Messiah, but in telling them that he is only the forerunner, he tells them that the Anointed One, (the Messiah) will be far more powerful than him, so much so that he is not even worthy to perform the duties of a slave to him. (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22). This would no doubt feed their expectations of a leader who would establish God's reign in an obvious way, using power to establish the rule of God (and their superiority), but Jesus is the Messiah of Isaiah's prophecy. By taking John's baptism of repentance Jesus, although he is without sin, fully enters into (is baptised into) the word of sin. Like Isaiah's servant, Jesus enters in to the darkness so that he can lead us out of it.

There is a real power in this scene. It is while he is praying, in deep communion with God, after becoming fully immersed in our state that he becomes endowed with God's spirit, identifying him as his Son. We erect between us and God, but in saying 'heaven opened', Luke is saying that the barrier is removed, allowing God to enter through Jesus. After the resurrection, Peter is able to look back to when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, as the starting point of the process which has now led to Cornelius' house, (Acts 10:34-38) and the momentous breakthrough for Peter, (and for the early church) when he can baptise Cornelius, a gentile. In other words, God's saving justice for all people was no longer a prophecy; it was happening.

To understand the significance of the events at the Jordan, it's important to ponder the full title: the Baptism of the Lord, i.e. the Baptism of God: God, having become flesh, is fully immersed into our lives, with all the limitations that involves. Peter's summary of Jesus' life – 'doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil' – shows how this immersion did not limit God's power; it allowed it to act in our lives without crushing reeds or snuffing out faltering wicks. The events at Cornelius' house show the barriers and limitations we impose and which not only separate us from each other but also separate people from God, are broken: Jesus being fully immersed in our lives means that we can become fully immersed in his life, through our Baptism. We shouldn't say, 'I was baptised', but 'I am baptised'. Martin Bennett

Monday (Fr. Richard Rohr)

The incarnation of Jesus demonstrates that God meets us where we are. It assures us that we do not have to leave the world or relinquish our humanity in order to know God. We may want the spiritual without the fleshly; we may want the cosmic without the concrete. But if the Word is ever to be loved and shared, we must risk embodiment, which is always concrete and ordinary. There God is both perfectly hidden and perfectly revealed.

Scripture (Matthew 3:13-17)

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him. "It is I who need baptism from you," he said "and yet you come to me!" But Jesus replied, "Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands." At this, John gave into him. As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him."

Tuesday (Martin Buber, "Tales of the Hasidim)

A helper is needed. A helper for both body and soul, for both earthly and heavenly matters.....who can teach you to conduct your affairs so that your soul remains free, and he can teach you to strengthen your soul, to keep you steadfast beneath the blows of destiny. He has to mix with the people and, in order to raise them to the rung of what perfection they are capable of, he has to descend from his own rung.

Scripture (John 3:11-13,16)

Jesus said "In truth I tell you, we speak about only what we know and witness only to what we have seen and yet you people reject our evidence. If you do not believe me when I speak of earthly things, how will you believe me when I speak of heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man; for this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Wednesday (A New Catechism)

We must be careful not to start from our human ideas of God, as though apart from Jesus we knew God fully. Jesus is not for those who (think they) know who God is, but for those who seek to know who God is. All we can do is fix our eyes on the man Jesus. Only by thus paying attention to him can we begin to realise something of the God who reveals himself in him. God is much greater than all the ideas we have of "greatness."
In Jesus' truly human knowledge, something of his likeness to God radiates. In Jesus, God has become accessible to us.

Scripture (Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7)

Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have endowed him with my spirit that he may bring true justice to the nations. He does not cry out or shout aloud, or make his voice heard in the streets. He does not break the crushed reed, nor quench the quavering flame. Faithfully he brings true justice; he will neither waver nor be crushed until true justice is established on earth. I, the Lord, have called you to serve the cause of right; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as a covenant of the people and light of the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison, and those who live in darkness from the dungeon.

Thursday (St. Teresa of Avila)

God is greatly pleased when He beholds a soul in its humility making His Son a mediator between itself and Him. I know this by experience. I have understood that the whole foundation of prayer must be laid in humility, and that the more a soul humbles itself in prayer, the more God lifts it up. I do not remember that He showed me any of His marvellous mercies at any other time than when I was as one brought to nothing. Moreover, His Majesty contrived to make me understand matters that helped me to know myself, but which I could never have even imagined of myself.

Scripture (Ephesians 1:17-20)

May the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom and perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his holy people, and how extraordinarily great is the power that he has exercised for us believers; this accords with the strength of his power at work in Christ.