

Friday (Desert Fathers)

One of the holy men named Philagrius lived in Jerusalem and worked hard to earn himself enough to eat. When he was standing in the market square trying to sell what he had made, a bag full of coins fell on the ground near him. Philagrius thought 'the one who lost this must soon come back.' Soon the man did come back looking very gloomy. Philagrius gave him his bag back. The man wanted to give the hermit some of the money, but the hermit would not take anything. Then the man began to call out 'Come and see what the man of God has done.' But Philagrius escaped unnoticed and went out of the town, so that they should not know what he had done, nor pay him honour.

Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:10-13)

When the Lord has brought you into the country which he swore to your ancestors that he would give you, with great and prosperous cities that you have not built, with houses full of good things you have not provided, with wells you have not dug, with vineyards and olive trees you have not planted, and then, when you have eaten as much as you want, be careful you do not forget God who has brought you out of Egypt. The Lord your God is the one you must fear, him alone you must serve, his is the name by which you must swear.

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6th Week of Ordinary Time

Not shackled by Comfort

Life occasionally throws up life-changing events such as falling in love, facing illness (your own or someone close), new job opportunities. Not only do these interventions disturb the daily routine, they also make us seriously question what really matters in life, maybe even forcing us to leave behind the old and choose a new way of living.

So does God.

Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, (Jer. 17:5-8), he presents people with a clear choice: base your life on God or on humans. Those who 'rely on things of the flesh', are cursed, i.e. their lives will be like scrub plants in the wilderness – dry and limited to survival; those who rely on God are blessed, i.e. will be rich and flourish like trees by the river. There is nothing wrong with 'Things of the flesh' – they are what make us human, e.g. human intelligence, emotions, fears, failings, capacity to love, and vision. It is putting these at the centre, as the foundation stones of life that is the problem. By definition they are much more limited than God's wisdom, strength and love. People who are unable to respond to the invitation to be part of his much bigger love are the plants growing in the wasteland, unable to see, (i.e. are unaffected) when good comes along – like the Pharisees who were intelligent, religious, almost certainly good people, but relied on their own laws and interpretations so were unable to see that Jesus was of God. People who rely on God, on the other hand, are those who flourish and bear fruit, even in the hard times, because their lives are rooted in the living, loving God.

It's easy to say 'I trust in the Lord' in church or in prayer, but when Jesus talks of those who are blessed and those who are to be pitied, (Luke 6:17-26), he is specific in the values which must be the basis of life – and they don't make comfortable reading for the rich and the comfortable. Jesus is quite clear that those who are poor, hungry and mourning are blessed, whilst the rich, well fed and enjoying life are to be pitied.

Surely Jesus can't really be blessing poverty, hunger, distress? Are all rich people in trouble? Only a careless reading of the Gospel could reach this conclusion. A huge crowd has turned up, travelling from all over, mainly coming to be cured and to listen to Jesus, but Luke is very specific that when Jesus' teaching is with his eyes 'fixed on his disciples'. He is talking to those who want to be his followers, to live by his teachings.

As Luke puts this immediately after the choosing of the twelve, Jesus is talking about the new Kingdom he has come to establish. To be a member of the Kingdom of God is to rely on him, not on human wealth and the security it brings. They will have to share in Jesus' longing for God's Kingdom to be established, i.e. to hunger for a world based on God's love, and to mourn for the suffering in a world that is estranged from him. Those who are 'laughing now' aren't necessarily bad, but their enjoyment comes from the present way of living; when that goes, they will mourn and weep. The disciples are invited to share the deeper happiness of a relationship with God and with each other, even though this will bring them into conflict with those who continue to live by the old ways.

If I want to be a disciple today, it doesn't mean I have to 'leave my fishing nets' and sell up, (I'm not called to be an apostle), but I still have to make an 'either / or' choice: am I satisfied with (and limited by) what brings security, comfort and the rewards of a materialistic society, or am I free to respond to the call to share in the work of building God's Kingdom, in daily life? Who and what do I really love? Martin Bennett

Monday (Meister Eckhart)

You should not worry yourself about food or clothing, feeling that these things are too good for you, but train your mind and ground your being to be above them. If good things come to you, you should accept them as being good, but in such a way that you would accept them just as willingly if they were different. We should give ourselves up entirely to God whenever he allows anything to befall us, whether insult, tribulation or any other kind of suffering. Willingly learn all things from God and follow him, and all will be well with you. You will be able to accept honour and comfort, and if dishonour and discomfort were your lot, you could and would be just as willing to endure these too. So they can justifiably feast who would just as willingly fast.

Scripture (Jeremiah 17:5-8)

The Lord says this 'Accursed be anyone who trusts in human beings, who relies on human strength and whose heart turns from Yahweh. He is like scrub in the wastelands: when good comes, it does not affect him since he lives in the parched [places in the desert. Blessed is anyone who trusts in Yahweh, with Yahweh for his hope. He is like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream: when the heat comes it has nothing to fear, its foliage stays green; untroubled in a year of drought, it never stops bearing fruit.

Tuesday (Fr. Michael Ivens, SJ)

Taken literally, the words *riches and honour* refer to material possessions, and social and ecclesiastical status. In the wider sense, they can be anything at all that meets the inherent human need for identity, security, esteem, love. The particular significance we attach to the things, situations or relationships that for us meet these needs, the quality of our desire for these, our criteria for seeking or accepting them—all this raises the basic issue of the kind of persons we are and want to be in relation to God and others.

Scripture (1Tim 6:7-11,17)

We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it; but as long as we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that. People who long to be rich are prey to trial; they get trapped in all sorts of foolish and harmful ambitions which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 'The love of money is the root of all evils' and there are some who, pursuing it, have wandered away from the faith and so given their souls to any number of fatal wounds. Instruct those who are rich in this world's goods that they should not be proud and should set their hopes, not on money, which is untrustworthy, but on God who gives us richly all we need for our happiness.

Wednesday (St. Francis of Assisi)

Let us be very careful of the malice and subtlety of Satan, who wishes that we do not raise our minds and hearts to God. He wishes to ensnare the heart of a person under the guise of some reward or help, and to snuff out our memory of the word and the precepts of the Lord, and wishes to blind the heart of a person through worldly affairs and concerns. Therefore, let us be very much on our guard so that we do not lose or turn away our mind and heart from the Lord. But in the holy love which is God, I beg all, as they overcome every obstacle and put aside every care and anxiety, to strive as best they can to serve, love and honour the Lord God.

Scripture (Luke 6:20-26)

Jesus said to his disciples 'How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal on account of the Son of man. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. But alas for you who are rich; alas for you who have plenty now. Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you.

Thursday (Oscar Romero)

A Christian's authenticity is shown in difficult hours, in those circumstances in which following the gospel supposes a multitude of ruptures with the tranquillity of an order that has been set up against or apart from the gospel. It is much easier to keep on following the many easy lords set up as idols of the moment: money, power, prestige and so on. How necessary in this difficult hour is a conscience docile to the Lord's truth. More than ever is there need for prayer that out of intimacy with God cuts one off from the confused clamour of life's shallow expediences, a will to be converted that is not afraid to lose prestige or privilege.

Scripture (Mk. 10;17-23)

A man asked Jesus 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'You know the commandments.' And the man said to him, 'Master, I have kept these since my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and was filled with love for him, and he said to him, 'You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Jesus said to his disciples, ' How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.'