

## **Friday (Brother Lawrence)**

Brother Lawrence began in the most perfect way, abandoning all for God, and doing all for the love of him. He forgot himself totally, and no longer thought of heaven or hell, nor of his past sins, nor of those he would commit after he had asked God's pardon for them. He never went back over his past confessions. He entered into perfect peace when he had confessed his sins to God. He knew of nothing else to do. After that he left himself in God's hands for life, death, time, eternity.

### **Scripture (Psalm 34: 1-4,7-8)**

*I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise continually on my lips. I will praise the Lord from my heart; let the humble hear and rejoice.*

*Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; let us acclaim his name together. I seek the Lord and he answers me, frees me from all my foes. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he rescues them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. How blessed are those who take refuge in him.*

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4th Week of Lent

### **Good people need to repent as well**

*Joshua's description of the Israelites reaching the Promised Land, (Joshua 5:9-12), has a real sense of the people having arrived, and of God being excited about his people living in freedom and able to flourish. He can now stop feeding them manna, as they can eat the produce of the land he has brought them to, and he has 'taken away the shame of Egypt', referring to the previous chapter when all the males were circumcised: the era of slavery is finished and they can now freely live their new life as people of the Covenant. As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem and the establishment of the new Covenant, which will enable people to live in a new relationship with God, it is clear that those in authority aren't ready for God's new way of acting. Jesus eating with sinners (continuing his mission to proclaim repentance and announce the Good News of this new Kingdom) shocks the Scribes and Pharisees, (Luke 15) and goes against what they know about God: Sharing a meal suggests friendship, with them give them a status they don't deserve, but sinners are no friend of God's, and to eat with them is to become tainted by them. Yet here's Jesus, letting them think they are ok. God is a judge who rewards and punishes according to obedience.*

*The parable of the Prodigal Son then, is far more than a tale of 'bad boy turns good'. It invites all to examine their relationship with God and the one they're invited into. Jesus takes care to show the younger son is a deeply rotten character who knows exactly what he is doing: to take the land and to sell it is to turn his back on his father (he breaks the 'honour your father and mother'); he also takes what belongs to the next generation (he is given the land in trust). He knowingly rejects his family, culture and religion by going to a foreign land for a life of ease and debauchery. There are no mitigating circumstances: he only has himself to blame when he ends up lower than the pigs. In desperation, he heads for home, thinking that maybe he'll get a job, knowing that he definitely isn't a son. But the Father has never stopped loving him – looking out for him, longing for him to come home – and then he runs to the son. Ridiculous! No, 'Look at you, you're a disgrace'; no demanding an apology or explanation, or promises of 'repaying'. The Father is overjoyed. He abandons his dignity by running (not a done thing in a patriarchy!), then treats this no good son like a king, (the robe and the ring). The older son, is outraged. I hardly know anyone who doesn't admit to agreeing with the hard working and upright older son, who has remained dutiful and faithful all this time. But perhaps it is the older son who still has the longest search: when the father tells him that 'all I have is yours', it is clear that he has lived surrounded by his father's abundant love, yet is unable to enjoy it. His hard work and never putting a foot wrong, together with his rejection of his unworthy brother, suggests he thinks he has to earn his father's love, unlike his brother who has learned that he has nothing to offer, that he doesn't deserve it and so can recognise the abundance of the Father's love. The younger son repented; the older son still needs to.*

*As an individual this is good news for me – knowing that God will never stop loving me – but it also challenges me: am I with the Scribes and Pharisees thinking 'that lot' aren't good enough, (i.e. 'God loves me more because I'm 'good'?). This also challenges us as a Church: do we keep our distance from the 'sinners' and wait for them to shape up, or do we go and eat with them, taking news of the freely loving forgiving God? Martin Bennett*

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

Whatever has been your past life, whether (blessed be God) you have never trusted aught but God's sacred light within you, or whether you have trusted the world and it has failed you, God's mercies in Christ are here offered to you in full abundance. Come to him for them. Let not your past sins keep you from him. Whatever they may be, they cannot interfere with his grace stored up for all who come to him for it. Keeping from him is not to escape from his power, but only from his love.

### **Scripture (Luke 15:14-20,23)**

*The younger son came to his senses and said to himself, "I will leave this place and go to my Father and say 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.'" While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. His father said to the paid servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.*

## **Tuesday (Henri Nouwen)**

The question is not 'How am I to love God' but 'How am I to let myself be loved by God?' God is looking into the distance for me and longing to bring me home. God is not the patriarch who stays home, doesn't move and expects his children to come to him, apologise for their aberrant behaviour, beg for forgiveness and promise to do better. On the contrary, he leaves the house, ignoring his dignity by running towards them, pays no heed to apologies and promises of change, and brings them to the table richly prepared for them.

### **Scripture (Ephesians 2:1-5)**

*And you were dead through the crimes and the sins which used to make up your way of life when you were living by the principles of this world, obeying the spirit who is at work among those who rebel. We, too, were all among them once, living only by our natural inclinations, obeying the demands of human self-indulgence and our own whim; our nature made us no less liable to God's retribution than the rest of the world. But God, being rich in faithful love, through the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, brought us to life in Christ and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.*

## **Wednesday (St. Teresa of Avila)**

Beware of a certain kind of humility suggested by the devil which is accompanied by great anxiety about the gravity of our sins. He disturbs souls in many ways by this means, until at last he stops them from receiving Holy Communion and from private prayer by doubts as to whether they are in a fit state for it, and such thoughts as 'Am I worthy of it?' Everything a person in this state says seems to be on the verge of evil, and all actions appear fruitless, however good they are in themselves. They become discouraged. When you are in this state, turn your mind so far as you can from your misery and fix it on the mercy of God, his love for us and all that he suffered for our sake.

### **Scripture (John 3:13-17)**

*As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life in him. 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. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world but so that through him the world might be saved*

## **Thursday (Carlo Carretto)**

When he comes to us in the sacrament at the fervent wish of our faith, the impossible comes true, impurity vanishes, violence becomes meekness, madness becomes beatitude, death becomes life. From the moment our lives cross his, the thing is done. He himself becomes our 'crossing,' the continuing Passover. Some people stay on the banks of the Reed sea all their lives. Enclosed in their own impotence, they cannot believe in God's omnipotence. It is difficult to have faith, to walk in hope. The Exodus lasted for forty years because the people of God found themselves unable to respond to God's love. They preferred to walk in the desert, frightened victims of their own contradictions and fears. God has constantly to ask: 'Is my hand too short to redeem?'

### **Scripture (Jeremiah 31:18-21)**

*'Bring me back, let me come back, for you are my God! For since I have turned away, I have repented; having understood, I beat my breast. I was deeply ashamed, I blushed, aware of the disgrace I incurred when I was young.' Is Ephraim, then, so dear a son to me, a child so favoured, that when I mention him I remember him lovingly still? That is why I yearn for him, why I must take pity on him, the Lord declares.*