

Friday (St. Francis of Assisi)

Our Father, from whom comes all good, may our knowledge of you become ever clearer that we may know the breadth of your blessings, the length of your promises, the height of your majesty, the depths of your judgments, so that you may rule in us through your grace and enable us to come to your kingdom, where there is an unclouded vision of you, a perfect love of you, a blessed companionship with you, an eternal enjoyment of you. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that we may love you with our whole heart and we may love our neighbours as ourselves by drawing them with all our strength to your love.

Scripture (Daniel 7:13-14)

I was gazing into the visions of the night when I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, as it were a son of man. He came to the One most venerable and was lead into his presence. On him was conferred rule, honour and kingship, and all peoples, nations and languages became his servants. His rule is an everlasting rule which will never pass away, and his kingdom will never come to an end.

martben1@btinternet.com
website, 'View from the Pew': martin-bennett.com

4th Week of Easter

Blessed who haven't seen but recognise the voice today

Whenever John uses 'I am' in his Gospel, it is to point us to Jesus' divinity, (it is a reference to God saying to Moses 'I am that I am'), so when Jesus says 'I am the good shepherd', (John 10:27-30), there is a lot packed into the few words. If we think of modern shepherds herding their sheep from behind, with the aid of sheepdogs, which are quick to harry any strays back in line, we miss what Jesus was saying. The shepherds in Jesus' time walked in front of their sheep, calling and the sheep would follow. More significantly, at night sheep from several flocks would be kept together in a safe place; in the morning, the shepherd would call and his sheep, recognising his voice, would come out of the general flock and follow him.

He is talking to 'the Jews', (the leaders who are opposed to Jesus) who have demanded that Jesus tell them plainly whether he is the Christ. His answer, 'I have told you... but you are no sheep of mine' is pretty damning: it says clearly that they do not recognise that he is the chosen one of God although those who follow Jesus who listen to the same words and see the same signs clearly do recognise his voice.

An important question to ask is 'if I had been there, would I have recognised Jesus' voice?', or rather, since I believe in the resurrection the much more important question is 'Do I recognise his voice?'

Paul and Barnabas preaching the Good News in Antioch, (the one in modern Turkey) helps me to decide, (Acts 13:43-52). One Saturday they make a big impression in the synagogue, many of the Jewish community follow them, and word spreads so that 'the whole town', including pagans comes to hear them preach on the following Saturday. Many Gentiles become believers and are happy, (they follow the voice), but the Jews' (the leaders) openly contradict everything they say and reject the Good News.

This is more than just rejecting a set of beliefs or a point of view. Paul and Barnabas are 'prophets', (Acts 11:27) and are 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. Therefore, it is God speaking in them, but the leaders fail to recognise this voice and so don't follow.

Their problem is that they are 'prompted by jealousy'. As these are good, devout people, I think this must be more than 'the green-eyed monster.' They have lived all their lives according to the Torah and traditions of the prophets – all of which they rightly believed came from God – and conscious of their heritage as God's Chosen People, (particularly as a community living amongst pagans in an important Roman city). They have a duty and responsibility to guard and pass on the teachings they were given, so their 'jealousy' is more likely to be in the sense of 'jealously guarding' their religion, (as in when God told Moses 'I am a jealous God.'). When Paul and Barnabas turn up with their new teaching, (filled with the Spirit just as much as the twelve in the Jerusalem had been when Jesus breathed on them) welcoming in all sorts who don't even know God, the leaders are clearly worried and enlist the help of devout women of the upper class, and the leading men – the educated people with responsibilities, but too full of their own rules, history and certainties to hear God speaking in a different way? That worries me. The words used at the lighting of the Paschal Candle, 'A flame divided but undimmed', remind us that there is no lessening of the power and presence of Jesus. He is present everywhere, speaking to us in prayer and in the middle of daily life. If I fail to recognise his voice, in daily life, it isn't because the Shepherd isn't calling. Martin Bennett

Monday (Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh)

If you learn to use a prayer you have chosen at moments when you can give all your attention to the divine presence and offer God this prayer, gradually what happens is that the awareness of God grows within you to such an extent that whether you are with people, listening, speaking or whether you are alone working, this awareness is so strong that even if you are with people you will still be able to pray. We listen to people, we do our work, we read, we do what we are supposed to, and the pain of bereavement, the awareness of joy is with us incessantly. This should also be the sense of the presence of God.

Scripture (John 10:27-30)

Jesus said: "The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me. The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one."

Tuesday (St. Teresa of Avila)

What utter blindness to seek for happiness where it cannot be found. Lord, give us light! See! We need it more than did the man who was born blind, for he longed to see the light but could not, while we do not wish to see it. O true God of mine! How hard a thing I ask of you. No less than you should love those who do not love you: should open to those who do not knock - should cure those who wish to ail. You said that you came to seek sinners: these are the real sinners!

Scripture (Psalm 100: 1-3,5)

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness, come into his presence with songs of joy. Know that he, the Lord, is God. He made us, we belong to him, his people, the flock of his sheepfold. Indeed, how good is the Lord, eternal his merciful love. He is faithful from age to age.

Wednesday (The Desert Fathers)

The presbyter of a church used to come to a hermit to consecrate the Eucharist for him. But someone else visited the hermit and told him evil things about the presbyter. The hermit would no longer let him in, so he went away. Then the hermit heard a voice saying, 'Men have taken my judgment into their own hands.' He saw a vision of a well of gold and a bucket of gold, and plenty of drinking water. He saw a leper emptying and refilling the bucket and he was thirsty but would not drink because it was a leper who had poured the water. Then the voice spoke a second time and said, 'Why don't you drink this water? What does it matter who draws it, for he only draws it and pours it out again.' The hermit realised what the vision meant. He called the presbyter and had him consecrate the Eucharist as before.

Scripture (Acts 13:44-51)

The next Sabbath, almost the whole town assembled to hear the word of God. When they saw the crowds, the Jews, filled with jealousy, used blasphemies to contradict everything that Paul said. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out fearlessly. 'We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think of yourselves as worthy of eternal life, here and now we turn to the pagans. It made the pagans very happy to hear this and they gave thanks to the Lord for this message. But the Jews stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their territory.'

Thursday (Carlo Carretto)

The will of God. That's what rules the world, what converts the nations, what brings to life and brings triumph out of death. The will of God made Christ incarnate and demanded his sacrifice; this it was that founded the Church. And it is God's will still to continue the work of redemption until the end of time. It will call people to enter one by one into the visible body of the Church when the time is ripe after having belonged to his invisible soul through their good intentions and good will.

Scripture (Ephesians 2:11-14,18-22)

Do not forget that there was a time when you who were pagans were separate from Christ and excluded from membership of Israel, aliens with no part in the covenants of the Promise and without God. But now in Christ Jesus, you who used to be so far off have been brought close by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us and has broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart. Through him, then, we both in the one Spirit have free access to the Father. So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household. And you, too, in him are being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.