

Friday (Evelyn Underhill)

The coming of the Kingdom is perpetual. Again and again freshness, novelty, power from beyond the world, break in by unexpected paths, bringing unexpected change. Those who cling to tradition and fear all novelty in God's relation with his world deny the creative activity of his Holy Spirit, and forget that what is now tradition was once innovation: that the real Christian is always a revolutionary, belongs to a new race, and has been given a new name and a new song.

Scripture (Romans 15: 16-18)

I was given grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles, dedicated to offer them the gospel of God so that they might become an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. So, I can be proud, in Christ Jesus, of what I have done for God. Of course I can dare to speak only of the things which Christ has done through me to win the allegiance of the gentiles, using what I have said and done, by the power of the Spirit of God.

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6th Week of Easter

God does not want to be organised

I'm not sure if I always take Jesus' promises seriously enough when he talks about God. When he says to his disciples, 'I and my Father will come and make a home with you', (Jn 14:23-29), my instinct is to assume he is talking to the twelve apostles, who are his close friends who have a big part to play in his plans after the resurrection, and are so obviously far more worthy and important than me. I would feel it was almost blasphemous if I was to say to people 'Guess who I've got living with me', but this is what's on offer – not in a guest room; not segregated in a 'soul' which is separate from the body; he isn't asking for a 'tabernacle in the mind' where I can talk to him when I'm praying. He wants to move in, and Jesus, is quite clear that the promise is for anyone who loves him (and keeps his word). Nothing about being in the right religion, no long list of rules, no 'qualifications' needed. Love Jesus and keep his word, (i.e. love God, love neighbour.) It not only sounds too good to be true, it sounds too simple, (maybe I like my mysteries to be complicated!).

The early Christians certainly found this very difficult to live out. During Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey from Antioch the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on both Jews and Gentiles, showing that Jesus meant what he said, but this brought about a huge crisis, (Acts 15). It wasn't that the early leaders and converts were against God's plan – they were happy to welcome all into the community – but they felt they had to organise and regulate it by making sure that all believers were circumcised and brought under the Law (of Moses), and that they fully understood the Laws, rules and regulations appropriate to being God's people. Luke rather glosses over how serious the crisis was when he says 'some men' came from Jerusalem and he mentions a 'disagreement'. St Paul's account of the same episode in Galatians 2 is more detailed: he goes to Jerusalem for what is clearly a showdown with the leaders, and with the Pharisees who have converted, but who are still steeped in the Law and the mentality which they have known all their life. He is even furious with Peter who, in the face of the pressure from powerful group from Jerusalem, backs down and stops eating with gentiles, even though he'd had the vision that God had no favourites. When Paul says that he wants to ensure that his work amongst the pagans isn't fruitless, (Gal. 2:3), he is saying to those in Jerusalem, 'I'm not going to let you put a stop to what is happening', which is saying no less than 'you must not put a stop on the work of the Holy Spirit'. The opposition to Pope Francis' way of doing things has shown that these same divisions are present in our church today. His opponents, (and there are many, particularly in the Vatican) have grave concerns that he is far too lax in applying the teachings and the traditions of the Church: it is all very well talking about love and mercy, but if we don't insist on the teachings and traditions of the Church, people will think they don't matter and that we can more or less do what we please. (Allowing divorced and remarried people to receive the Eucharist, for instance, brings all these arguments to the boil). These divisions have been present in the Church all along. We worry about 'getting it right' and about 'watering down' the faith, and rightly so, but the experience of the divided and troubled early church is helpful: James says, 'It has been decided by us and the Holy Spirit'. Whether it is in Church meetings or in private prayer, perhaps we should use God more to guide us. After all, he is living with us. Martin Bennett

Monday (Meister Eckhart)

I was once asked: 'Some people like to withdraw from company and prefer always to be alone. That is where they find peace, when they enter church. Is this the best thing?' My answer was 'No!', and this is the reason. Those who are rightly disposed truly have God with them in all places: on the street, in any company, as well as in a church or a remote place. No one can obstruct such a person. Such a person bears God with them in all that they do and wherever they go, and it is God who acts through them. Thus we should be permeated with the sense of a divine presence and be informed with the form of our beloved God and be so established in him that we see his presence effortlessly.

Scripture (Wisdom 8:9-12)

I therefore determined to take wisdom to share my life, knowing that she would be my counsellor in prosperity and comfort me in cares and sorrow. Thanks to her, I shall be admired by the masses and honoured, though young, by the elders. I shall be reckoned shrewd as a judge, and the great will be amazed at me. They will wait on my silences, and pay attention when I speak.

Tuesday (Hans Kung)

The Hebrew word from which church is derived means 'assembly' (of God). Here the reference is to both the process of assembling and the assembled community. According to the New Testament, every individual local community is given what it needs for human salvation; the gospel to proclaim, baptism as a rite of initiation, the celebration of a meal in grateful remembrance, the various charisms and ministries. Thus every local church makes the whole church fully present; indeed, it may understand itself - in the language of the New Testament - as people of God, body of Christ and the building of the Spirit.

Scripture (Acts 15:23-26,28,32-35)

We here that some people coming from here, but acting without any authority from ourselves have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds; and so we have decided to delegates with our well-beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have committed their lives to the name of Jesus Christ. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and ourselves not to impose any burdens on you beyond the essentials. After Judas and Silas had gone back, Paul and Barnabas stayed on in Antioch, and there with many others they taught and proclaimed the good news, the word of the Lord.

Wednesday (C.S.Lewis)

There are three things that spread the Christ-life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action, the Eucharist. At least, those are the three ordinary methods...I cannot see myself see why these things should be the conductors of the new kind of life, but I can tell you why I believe it is so. I believe that Jesus was (and is) God. And it seems plain as a matter of history that he taught his followers that the new life was communicated in this way. In other words, I believe it on his authority.

Scripture (John 14:23-28)

Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make a home in him. Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not my own: it is the word of the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you: but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you. Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. You heard me say: I am going away and shall return.

Thursday (John Main, OSB)

There is no renewal of the church despite all the energy expended on courses, meetings and reorganization if there is not also a radical renewal in spirit. Because of its depth and the nature of its mystery, this radical renewal is not in our own power to make happen. What we can do is prepare for the power that will do it. Our preparation is deepening openness and vulnerability to the power of God dwelling in us. This is prayer. Religious renewal boils down to a renewal in prayer.

Scripture (1 Cor. 2:7-8, 10-12)

It is of the mysterious wisdom of God that we talk, the wisdom that was hidden, which God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began. None of the rulers of the age recognised it; for if they had recognised it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; to us, though, God has given revelation through the Spirit, for the Spirit explores the depths of everything, even the depths of God. Now, the Spirit we have received is not the spirit of the world but God's own Spirit, so that we may understand the lavish gifts God has given us.