

Friday (Caryll Houselander)

Let your prayer be simply your offering of yourself to do God's will, to rest and relax in him, and to offer everything you do as prayer; for example, if you have a little sleep, offer that; offer each mouthful of food that you eat, offer whatever you suffer, but all this simply and without any attempt at formal words. This kind of prayer brings you closer to God than anything you can say or think because it breaks down every barrier between you and God, every shred of resistance to his will, and allows him to speak to you, to hold you in his hand and surround you with his love.

Scripture (Psalm 51:6, 10-12)

You delight in sincerity of heart, and in secret you teach me wisdom. God, create in me a pure heart, renew within me a steadfast spirit, do not thrust me away from your presence, do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.

martben1@btinternet.com

Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul

I have often wondered why Peter and Paul have to share a feast day when so many other saints have their own day. Perhaps I am influenced by being a twin who always had to share the limelight on my birthday when I wanted the focus to be fully on me (as a child!), so part of me feels these two deserve my undivided attention to better appreciate their qualities and achievements, and so to strive to be more like them, (taking comfort from their flaws.).

Matthew's account of Peter being chosen as the rock on which the church is built, (Mt. 16:13-19) gives me the first clue as to why the focus should not be on the individuals. This is a pivotal point in the gospel: after this, Jesus turns decisively to Jerusalem and in preparing his apostles for their roles after his death, the choice of leader is crucial. Peter is not chosen because of anything he has done: "Blessed are you Peter because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this too you but my Father in heaven". The truth had been revealed and Peter responded. The church, then, would be built on the person who was able to respond to, to be led by, God. In giving Peter the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, he was giving a great deal of power to Peter, and he had much to learn about using that power. As Jesus immediately begins to talk of his suffering, Peter has to learn that the power lies in obedience to God: he must be humble to allow God to act. The humility was evident in the death of Jesus; the power was evident in the resurrection. The same pattern is evident when Peter is imprisoned in Acts 12:1-11. He is in this predicament because of his obedience to his calling and the details of the guards and chains make clear that Peter is powerless against King Herod and the Jews. The miraculous delivery, however, shows that God's power is greater. The similarities between Peter being delivered from prison by angels and Jesus being delivered from the tomb establish that just as death had no power of Jesus, human powers, (sin) cannot thwart his church.

Paul, too, writes from a prison cell, (2 Timothy 4), fully aware that his death is close. This is not a problem either for him, (his 'crown of righteousness' is assured), or, more importantly if we recognise that our faith is never just a matter of our own personal salvation, for the church. Though the forces against them are so powerful, they will not be defeated because of 'the grace that is in Christ Jesus', (2:1). Again, the pattern of humble obedience allowing God's power is evident. Like Jesus, Paul had been deserted by his supporters so he was alone at his trial, which allowed him to recognise that the Lord had given him the power to fully proclaim the message to the gentiles. If he had been relying on human strength and wisdom, I'm sure the focus would have been on saving his life, (for many excellent reasons, given that he was such a key figure). Throughout the letter, his concern is to strengthen Timothy and to urge him to take up the leadership confident that nothing can stop the church.

Because the church celebrates Peter and Paul together, the humble acceptance of being chosen by God and so allowing God to work through them as the essence of their leadership and how the church grew because of them becomes clear. They lead, I follow.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

Humility is central to the Christian life; it is facing the truth about who God is, and the truth of who I am. Humility in another is a very beautiful thing to see; but the attempt to become humble is painful indeed. It hurts to be criticised, to be misunderstood, to be written off. None of us enjoys walking that way. Our Lord must have felt like this at the end of his life. Everybody had turned against him. They were going to execute him; they were insulting him. We know that this moment of failure was God's moment of success. Oddly enough, I believe that for some of us it is when we realise how little we are regarded by others that we begin to realise how highly we are esteemed by God. Whenever I feel inadequate or a failure, God can enter into my life and bring his success.

Scripture (Matthew 16:13-17)

Jesus put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.' Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Peter rebuked him, saying 'Lord, this must not happen to you.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying "Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle in my path because you are thinking not as God thinks but as humans think."

Tuesday (Martin Luther)

The wisdom of the cross is deeply hidden in a profound mystery. In fact, there is no other way to heaven than taking up the cross of Christ. On account of this, we must be aware that the active life with its good works, and the contemplative life, with its speculations, do not lead us astray. Both are most attractive and yield peace of mind, but for that very reason they hide real dangers, unless they are tempered by the cross and disturbed by adversaries. The cross is the surest path of all. Blessed are those who understand this truth.

Scripture (John 21:18)

Peter was hurt when Jesus asked him a third time 'Do you love me?' and said 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him 'Feed my sheep. In all truth I tell you, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will take you where you would rather not go.' In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said 'Follow me.'

Wednesday (Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh)

Doing the will of God is a discipline in the best sense of the word. It is by doing in every detail, in every moment, to the utmost of our power, using our intelligence, our will, our skill, our experience, that we can gradually learn to be strictly, earnestly obedient to the Lord God. Unless we do this, our discipleship is an illusion and all our life of discipline, when it is a set of self-imposed rules in which we delight, makes us proud and self-satisfied, leaves us nowhere, because discipleship is the ability to reject ourselves, to allow the Lord Christ to be our mind, our will, our heart. Unless we renounce ourselves and accept his life in place of our life, we shall never be disciplined or disciples.

Scripture (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18)

As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing. But the Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed for all the gentiles to hear; and so I was saved from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Thursday (Henri Nouwen)

In answer to Jesus' question "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" it is not easy to distinguish between doing what we are called to do and doing what we want to do. True action leads us to the fulfilment of our vocation. Whatever our position in life, the question is not "What do I most want?" but "What is my vocation?" The most prestigious position in society can be an expression of obedience to our call as well as a sign of our refusal to hear that call, and the least prestigious position, too, can be a response to our vocation as well as a way to avoid it. If our actions flow from our call, we are in fact drinking our cup, bit by bit. The sorrows of our lives will no longer paralyse us, nor will our joys make us lose our perspective.

Scripture (Romans 6:15-18)

You are living not under Law, but under grace. What is the implication? That we are free to sin? Out of the question! You know well that if you undertake to be somebody's slave and obey him, you are the slave of him you obey; you can be the slave of either sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to saving justice. Once you were slaves of sin, but thank God you have given whole-hearted obedience to the pattern of teaching to which you were introduced.