

Friday (A Carthusian)

The mist, the darkness, the anxiousness are all part of the divine plan which leads to the supreme light. A soul which sees nothing but darkness but says to Him: 'My God, I see nothing, but because you tell me that this darkness is your light, I believe it. Everything in me tells me the contrary, but I give up this "me" and listen to you rather than to it': such a soul puts God in his true place – first. It is clear that this is the hardest sacrifice of all. *Let him deny himself.* Believe, then, in this topsy-turvy world in which we have to live, in this world so bereft of peace and so far from God – above all in our soul, that soul so crushed –
GOD IS PRESENT.

Scripture (Wisdom 9:13-18)

What human being can know the intentions of God? And who can comprehend the will of the Lord? The reasonings of mortals are unsure and our intentions unstable; for a perishable body presses down the soul, and this tent of clay weighs down the mind with its many cares. It is hard enough for us to work out what is on earth, laborious to know what lies within our reach; who, then, can discover what is in the heavens? And who could ever have known your will, had you not given Wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from above? Thus have the paths of those on earth been straightened and people have been taught what pleases you, and saved, by Wisdom.

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23rd Week of Ordinary Time

Discipleship: knowing the direction, not the destination

When Jesus says that no one can be a disciple unless they hate all family members and their own life, (Luke 14:25-33), my reaction is 'I wonder what he really meant'. When I discover that he meant what he said, I feel that (a) he isn't the person I thought he was, (b) I don't want to be a disciple.

I could suggest that the word should be translated 'prefer' rather than 'hate', but the context suggests this would be an attempt to make Jesus into the person I want him to be, (much tamer, less challenging) and so make discipleship far less demanding, (and therefore far more limited). Jesus' words are direct: 'Before we go any further, I want you to be clear about what being a follower of mine involves, and if you can't take it, now is the time to leave'.

I'm certain he wouldn't advocate breaking 'honour your father and mother', but am equally certain he used the word hate, possibly as a common way of speaking to emphasise a point in the way we might say to an awkward person, 'You'll be the death of me'. Jesus emphasised that nothing and no one could take priority over commitment to following his path, which for him would lead to the cross.

The command to 'pick up your cross' has nothing to do with 'everyone has their cross to bear' used in the context of people having troubles to contend with: God does not inflict these on people! Jesus' way to the cross was because of his refusal to compromise his obedience to God. This makes sense of the second stage of his command, '...and come after me', meaning that would-be followers must follow where God leads. 'Picking up your cross' is an attitude rather than a destination. The would-be followers had a different expectation of the destination to Jesus, and there is no way his followers could have seen the cross as the way to establish the Kingdom, (even Jesus struggled with it in Gethsemane), so to follow Jesus was to be able to trust God as he did.

Solomon was an excellent example of someone who based his life on obedience to discovering and following God's ways. In many ways, he had no need to turn to God: he was wise and powerful; he had models for ruling from history and he also, no doubt, had plenty of advisors, military and political. He was, however, wise enough to know how limited human life and intelligence is compared to God's Wisdom (Wisdom 9). Solomon also knew that God would give him his Wisdom and the holy Spirit so that he could learn God's will and complete the task he has been given. In other words, he did not ask for everything to be made clear, nor did he expect to be able to understand everything. To discover God's will was enough: he asked for the way ahead to be revealed, rather than to see the final destination.

Although it's not on the cards that 'picking up the cross' will cost me my life, it still requires me to be free of attachments to the habits, possessions and attitudes, (and, possibly, people) which stop me from following Jesus by living according to God's way. His way (of love) takes me far beyond the limits of my own perspectives, fears, flaws and limited hopes because he is inviting me to share in his work, building his Kingdom, rather than just my kingdom. The invitation to follow Jesus, then, is to choose to live daily life guided by God, not looking for personal gain. This does put me at odds with the norms of society and my own instinct for security and comfort: it is these attachments which I must 'hate' and be free from. Martin Bennett

Monday (C.S.Lewis)

For it is not so much of our time and so much of our attention that God demands; it is not even all our time and all our attention; it is ourselves. He will be infinitely merciful to our repeated failures; I know no promise that he will accept a deliberate compromise. What cannot be admitted is the idea of something that is “our own,” some area in which we are to be “out of school”, on which God has no claim. For he claims all, because he is love and must bless. He cannot bless us unless he has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, he claims all. There’s no bargaining with him.

Scripture (Luke 14:25-31,33)

Great crowds accompanied him on his way and he turned and spoke to them. ‘Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and their own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry their cross and come after me can be my disciple. And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see that they had enough to complete it? So in the same way, none of you can be my disciples without giving up all that you own.

Tuesday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

And what do we learn from Jesus about the content of discipleship? Follow me, run along behind me! That is all. The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relatively security into a life of absolute insecurity, from a life which is observable and calculable into a life where everything is unobservable and fortuitous, out of the realm of the finite into the realm of infinite possibilities

Scripture (Romans 11:33-36)

How rich and deep are the wisdom and the knowledge of God! We cannot reach to the roots of his decisions or his ways. Who has ever known the mind of the Lord? Who has ever been his adviser? Who has ever given anything to him, so that his presents come only as a debt returned? Everything there is comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen.

Wednesday (St. John of the Cross)

A blind person, if they are not totally blind, will not commit themselves wholly to their guide, but because they see a little think a certain road is secure, not seeing another which is better. The soul, if it leans upon any understanding, sense, or feeling of its own is most easily led astray or hindered. For the more importance the soul attributes to what it understands, and the greater the estimation it holds it in, whether it be spiritual or not, the more it detracts from the supreme good. On the other hand, the less it esteems all that it may have in comparison with the supreme good, the more does it magnify and esteem the supreme good, and consequently the greater the progress towards it.

Scripture (Matthew 16:21-23,24)

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and the chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter began to rebuke him. ‘Heaven preserve you, Lord,’ he said, ‘this must not happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as humans do.’

Thursday (Cardinal Newman)

O my God, give me your grace so that the things of this earth and things more naturally pleasing to me, may not be as close as you are to me. Keep my eyes, my ears, my heart from clinging to the things of this world. Break my bonds, raise my heart. Keep my whole being fixed on you. Let me never lose sight of you; and while I gaze on you, let my love of you grow more and more every day.

Scripture (John 17:13-17)

Jesus said, ‘Father, now I am coming to you and I say these things in the world to share my joy with them to the full. I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world. I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from evil. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth’