

Friday (Oscar Romero)

The present form of this world passes away, and there remains only the joy of having used this world to establish God's rule here. All pomp, all triumphs, all selfish capitalism will pass with the world's form. All of that passes away. What does not pass away is love. When one has turned money, property, work in one's calling into service of others, then the joy of sharing and the feeling that all are one's family does not pass away. In the evening of life you will be judged on love.

Scripture (Romans 1:18-21)

The retribution of God from heaven is being revealed against the ungodliness and injustice of human beings who in their injustice hold back from the truth. For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them, since God has made it plain to them: ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so these people have no excuse: they knew God and yet they did not honour him.

ps there was an inspirational (and unsettling) lecture given by David McLoughlin (Newman University) for this year's Liverpool Romero Lecture. The title was 'Prophetic Trajectories of Hope from San Salvador to Liverpool', celebrating the ministries of Oscar Romero, Austin Smith, Kevin Kelly & Tom Cullinan – three Liverpool priests whose lives and ministries were hugely significant.

If you would like to read the text of the talk, please email me.

Also, please visit the new website to find out more about the three priests, and to read / hear the work of Fr. Tom Cullinan. The first 'batch' of his writings are available now and will be added to each month. Go to fr-tom-cullinan.co.uk

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26th Week of Ordinary Time

The more money you have, the louder it talks, the less you hear

When God begins with 'Woe to you' in the Old Testament, you know that he's angry and that those in the firing line don't have long to radically mend their ways. In Amos 6, it's the rich (again) who are about to have their luxurious and self-indulgent lifestyle taken off them before they are taken into exile. As I have moments when I'm acutely aware that I live a privileged, comfortable and secure lifestyle, it's worth my while looking at exactly why God is so angry. If it was the lavish and decadent lifestyle and the excess of their revelries, I would feel ok, and could feel confident that he isn't saying woe to me. But that isn't, in itself, what really matters. God is angry, firstly, at how they got their wealth. Amos is clear elsewhere that there is much dishonesty and swindling involved on an individual level, and that exploitation and neglect of the poor is systemic. In Amos 6, though, the problem with wealth is how it seduces the rich away from reality. God says, 'woe to those who feel safe' meaning those who think that their own wealth and power gives them security. They have forgotten that all comes from God, or worse, they think they are now self-sufficient and no longer need him.

In being cut off from God, they are also cut off from people. They are 'the notables' responsible for the state, the leaders to whom ordinary people are dependent on and to whom they should be able to turn for advice and justice. It is because the wealthy don't notice, or don't care about, the poor that they are in trouble.

When Jesus tells of the Rich Man and Lazarus, (Luke 16:19-31), he makes the same point. It isn't saying 'rich equals bad, poor equals good'. The parable makes the point that the rich man's fate is determined by the way he handles the good things that come his way in life and not connecting these to the bad things that come Lazarus' way. Jesus uses enough detail to leave us in no doubt that this is a very rich man who seemed to care nothing for Lazarus, but this isn't simply a parable about wealth and greed.

He may claim that he didn't cause Lazarus' problems; it is even quite possible he never actually saw Lazarus, (as the very rich lived in large compounds rather than a detached house with drive, the gate where Lazarus lay would be a distance away, and probably by the servants' entrance and kitchens, which is where dogs would be more likely to sniff around). Another defence might be that he had been born into this wealth and into the belief that riches were a blessing from God, so it is only now that he is out of it he can see what was wrong. None of these reasonable excuses count. The rich man's 'crime' is that he doesn't notice or doesn't care. He would certainly be aware of 'the poor': when the rich man calls on Abraham as his father he is laying claim to being a member of God's people. He has therefore heard the prophets regularly in the synagogue so will know of God's concern for the poor and the rich people's responsibility for them, yet has, like the rich in Amos, managed to keep religion out of daily life.

Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees 'who loved money' and who 'jeered at him' when they heard his teaching on the right use of money. Somehow, these devoutly religious and highly knowledgeable people had divorced scripture and religion from love of the poor. Jesus is, at the same time, speaking to those who would be his disciples, drawing them out of a narrow, self-centred life where 'wealth' and security insulates and separates me from God and from others, (hell), into the light where we can see, hear and so become part of his much bigger life, (heaven). Lord, open my eyes and ears. Martin Bennett

Monday (John V. Taylor)

The Holy Spirit is that power which opens eyes that are closed, hearts that are unaware and minds that shrink from too much reality. If one is closed up against being hurt, or blind to one's fellow men one is inevitably shut off against God also. One cannot choose to be open in one direction or closed in another. Vision and vulnerability go together. Insensitivity is also an all-rounder.

Scripture (Luke 16:19-22,25-31)

There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there used to lie a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. Abraham said to the rich man, 'Remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus had his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony.' So he said, "Father, I beg you, to send Lazarus to warn my brothers so that they do not come to this place.' Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets. If they will not listen to them, they will not be convinced, even if someone should rise from the dead."

Tuesday (William Wilberforce)

Take the instances of loving kindness and meekness towards others and observe the solid foundation which is laid for them in self-denial, in moderation as to the good things of this life and in humility. The religious system of the bulk of nominal Christians is satisfied with some tolerable appearances of virtue and accordingly, while it recommends love and beneficence, it tolerates pride and vanity in many cases; though these qualities may have a soft exterior and courtly demeanour, they cannot so well accord with the genuine internal principle of love.

Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:11-14,17,19)

Be careful not to neglect Yahweh your God by neglecting his commandments, customs and laws which I am laying down for you today. When you have eaten all you want, when you have built fine houses to live in, your silver and gold abound and all your possessions grow great, do not become proud of heart. Do not then forget Yahweh your God. Beware of thinking to yourself, "My own strength and the might of my own hand have given me the power to act like this." Be sure: if you forget Yahweh your God, you will perish.

Wednesday (Thomas Merton)

There is a stage in our prayer that is a place of darkness and anguish and of conversion: for here a great change takes place in our spirit. All our love for God appears to us to have been full of imperfection. With shame and sorrow we find that our love was full of complacency. Instead of complacently calling ourselves sinners (and secretly believing ourselves just) we begin to find that the sins of our past life were really sins – and we have not regretted them! We have still sinned without realising it, because we were too sure we were friends with God, and we have taken his graces lightly, or taken them to ourselves and turned them to our own selfish profit and used them for our own vanity. We have revelled in his gifts without thanking him or using them for his glory.

Scripture (Amos 6:1,4-7)

Disaster for those so comfortable in Zion and for those so confident on the hill of Samaria. Lying on ivory beds and sprawling on their divans, they dine on lambs from the flock, and on stall-fattened veal; they bawl to the sound of the lyre and they invent new instruments of music like David, they drink wine by the bowlful, and use the finest oil for anointing themselves, but about the ruin of Joseph they care nothing. That is why they will be the first to be exiled; the sprawlers' revelry is over.

Thursday (Jean Vanier)

Is not one of the problems today that we have separated ourselves from the poor and the wounded and the suffering? We have too much time to discuss and theorize and have lost the yearning for God which comes when we are faced with the sufferings of people.

Scripture (Tobit 4:7-11)

Set aside part of your goods for almsgiving. Never turn your face from the poor and God will never turn his from you. Measure your alms from what you have; if you have much, give more; if you have little, do not be afraid to give less in alms. So doing, you will lay up a great treasure for the day of necessity. For almsgiving will deliver from death and saves people from passing down to darkness.