

Friday (Henri Nouwen)

According to the dictionary, displacement means 'to move or to shift from the ordinary or proper place'. This becomes a telling definition when we realise the extent to which we are preoccupied with adapting ourselves to the prevalent norms and values of our milieu. In voluntary displacement, we begin to experience our true condition, which is that we, like everyone else, are pilgrims on the way, sinners in need of grace. Through voluntary displacement we counteract the tendency to become settled in false comfort. The Greek word for church, ekklesia, indicates that, as a Christian community we are called out of our familiar places to unknown territories.

Scripture (Genesis 12:1-4)

The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I will show you; and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous; you are to be a blessing! So Abram went as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

martben1@btinternet.com

2nd Week of Lent

If you stop sitting comfortably, you can begin

God is asking a lot of Abraham to leave behind his father, (his roots), and land (his security), to set off for an unknown destination and an uncertain future. Abraham would have many sensible reasons not to agree to God's call: at the age of 75, with no children and a wife who is past child bearing age, it's surely impossible for him to fulfil God's intention, that he be the founder of a great race.

Perhaps that's precisely why God chose Abraham: for humans, it's impossible, but not for God. Because of this, other nations will bless themselves by Abraham, i.e. recognise that it was God's power, infinitely greater than ours, working in Abraham.

His plans for us are also far greater. If God had asked Abraham, 'what can you do for me?', Abraham would not have thought of anything remotely near to 'Well, I could start the race of the chosen people for you.' God's power, his plans (and his timescale), are beyond our imagination, so it is only by faith that Abraham could respond, knowing only that he would be taken beyond his own understanding into God's plan.

The same was true for the three apostles who witnessed Jesus' Transfiguration, (Mt. 17:1-9). When Peter sees Jesus become shining white and talking to Moses and Elijah, his 'it is wonderful for us to be here' and wanting to build three shelters links the incident to the Feast of Shelters, a harvest celebration, suggests he thinks they are being privileged to see Jesus in his fulfilled glory. This would make sense as Moses and Elijah – representing the Law and the Prophets – talking to Jesus in the middle point to him as the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Then the bright cloud covers them and the voice (of God) tells them they must listen to Jesus, his Son: this isn't the end of the story. Moses and Elijah both went up a mountain to meet God, and each time they were sent down to teach God's way for living in the Covenant. When they met God, Moses and Elijah were the only ones present and could not look on the face of God, (which is presumably why it's only when God speaks that the three apostles are terrified), but in taking three friends with him, Jesus signals a breakthrough: because of him, the infinite power of God becomes open to humans. This, then, was the beginning of a new phase. They would need to listen to Jesus, who now begins to head for Jerusalem. As with Abraham, the journey will take them into the unknown in that all their ideas of what the Messiah will prove to be wrong, (it is, for instance, these same three who will witness the terrified Jesus in Gethsemane and witness his powerlessness when he was arrested.)

The question is, will God intervene so dramatically (and disruptively!) in our lives? When St. Paul, writes his second letter to Timothy, from prison in Rome, he urges Timothy to 'fan into a flame' the gift he has been given, (when Paul laid his hands on him.) The power of the Romans in opposing the spread of the Gospel was great, and Timothy would have plenty of sensible reasons for keeping a low profile and just preserving the faith (and his life) until the situation improved. Paul however, insists that Timothy relies on the power of God, given for His purpose - to spread the Good News. We may not be able to go to the mountain top, but through the Word of God and the Eucharist, we come into contact with God. As with Abraham, the apostles and Timothy, this will bring us into being active participants in God's plan. We must, through the disciplines of prayer and fasting be open to hear and be free to respond. Martin Bennett

Monday (Malcolm Muggeridge.)

It was while she was teaching at the convent school that the second great break came in Mother Teresa's life. She had occasion to go into the very poorest streets in Calcutta and suddenly realised that she belonged there, not in the convent with its pleasant garden, eager pupils, congenial colleagues and rewarding work. Again, the only impediment to her new vocation was the happiness and happy relationships it required her to relinquish.

Scripture (John 12:23-36)

Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. In all truth I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am, and my father will honour him.

Tuesday (A Carthusian)

The Christian submits to the will of a Person who rules and orders everything according to the plan of his love for humanity. Often the Christian is unable to understand the meaning of incidents in the drama in which they are engaged. They must have confidence in the Father, abandon themselves to his will and believe in a redemptive outcome. Our life is a paschal life with the blood of the resurrection flowing through our veins. For us, everything is hidden under a veil of faith. Let us live like people who see the invisible, who are animated by the Spirit of God. Let us put our confidence in God and go forward towards the meeting with the unexpected that come to us from God.

Scripture (1Cor.1:20-25)

It was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel. While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ; to the Jews, an obstacle they cannot overcome, to the gentiles, foolishness, but to those who have been called, a Christ who is both the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Wednesday (Dietrich Bonhoeffer.)

It is more prudent to be a pessimist. It is an insurance against disappointment, and no-one can say "I told you so". The essence of optimism is that it takes no account of the present, but it is a source of inspiration, of vitality and hope where others have resigned. The optimism which is will for the future should never be despised, even if it is proved wrong one hundred times. It is the health and vitality which a sick man should never impugn.

Scripture (Romans 8:24-27)

In hope, we already have salvation; in hope, not visibly present, or we should not be hoping – nobody goes on hoping for something which they can already see. But having this hope for what we cannot yet see, we are able to wait with persevering confidence. And as well as this, the Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness; for, when do not know how to pray properly, then the Spirit personally makes our petitions, for us in groans that we cannot put into words.

Thursday (St. John of the Cross)

Greatly embarrassed is the soul, on the road of divine union, when it leans at all on its own understanding, sense, imagination, judgment, will or any habits of its own, not knowing how to free and detach itself therefrom. For the soul courageously resolved on passing, interiorly and exteriorly beyond the limits of its own nature, enters without limits into the supernatural. Therefore, rising above all that may be known and understood, temporally and spiritually, the soul must desire to reach that which in this life cannot be known, and which the heart cannot conceive.

Scripture (Matthew 17:4-9)

Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with a shadow, and suddenly from the cloud came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'