<u>Friday</u> (Malcolm Muggeridge)

If it is true, as St. Paul tells us – and it surely is – that all things work for good to them that love God, then all that is required of us is that we should love God, and, in loving him, fall in with his purposes. I once scribbled down my own version of the prayer of St. Augustine: "Oh God, stay with me. Let no word cross my lips that is not your word, no thought enter my mind that is not your thought, no deed be ever done or entertained by me that is not your deed."

<u>Scripture</u> (1 Cor. 12:4-6,12-13.)

There are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts, so it is with Christ. We were baptised into one body in a single Spirit, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as free, and we were all given the same Spirit to drink.

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5th Week of Easter

<u>2,000 years later, we are no further away from Jesus</u>

After its period of rapid growth after Pentecost, the Christian community seemed to be in danger of following a pattern common to many groups which flourish around a charismatic leader or a set of shared ideals. By Acts 6 fault lines have become evident. The dispute about the Hellenist widows being overlooked, (Acts 6:1-7) is a symptom of a deep split which would, if not dealt with properly, lead to the church splintering.

The church is made up of people from two distinct communities – the 'native' and well established Aramaic speaking Jews of Jerusalem and the Greek speaking Jews who have recently come from other parts of the Diaspora. Although they are all Jews, they are divided socially and in religion: they have separate synagogues and listen to the bible in their own languages. It is also clear later in Acts that the Hellenists are more conservative with regard to religion – it is the Hellenist Jews who want to kill the converted Saul.

One solution would be for the apostles to impose their authority to ensure all members 'sing from the same hymn sheet', i.e. the way the Pharisees and Scribes acted.

This crisis, however, becomes a significant point of growth in the church because by sticking to their task of leading prayer and passing on the teachings of Jesu they do not allow Jesus to be pushed out of the centre, (just as Jesus had recognised that it was vital to keep God at the centre, hence his trip to the desert), In doing this they are, as Peter says (1 Peter 2:4-9), ensuring that Jesus remains the cornerstone.

This could have sown the seeds for the next division: an 'elite' who know more so are responsible for all the decisions and steering the church, and the others who can get on with the menial tasks. The apostles, however, insisted that the people who are chosen are not only trustworthy, but are also filled with the Spirit. Their act of praying over and laying their hands on those put forward ensures that the presence of Jesus continues.

The new leaders are empowered by the apostles, who were empowered by Jesus. The structure is not one of control, but of obedience, which was something Jesus insisted was necessary, (John 1:1-12). It is only through Jesus that we come to know the Father—he is the Way because he is the only one who is able to reveal to us full knowledge of the Father—he is the Truth. Because he is in the Father and the Father is in him, Jesus is not a guide, he is the <u>source</u> of life and truth. Through him, his power becomes ours: 'Whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself.'

I am not sure I take this seriously enough, but I should: the apostles were not simply organising an efficient structure with themselves at the top: they were ensuring the growth of the church, as seen in the key contributions of Stephen and Philip in the following chapters of Acts.

When Peter later writes to the Christians who have now spread out from Jerusalem, this continuity is maintained. The church is a living building, with believers as living stones and Jesus as the cornerstone. Through our Baptism and Confirmation, and through the Eucharist, through prayer and Scripture, our connection to Jesus is no less than apostles' and the early Christians': we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, according to Peter. In the Old Testament the priests were the mediators between God and people, in the Temple. Through Jesus as cornerstone and us as the living stones, God is accessible to all

Martin Bennett

Monday (Bede Griffiths)
I remember a friend who joined a team working with the poor in Brazil. The idea was that there was no need for mass or prayer because Christ was in the poor. One only had to go out to the poor and one would meet Christ in them. So they concentrated only on active service to the poor. Within a few years the work totally disintegrated. I think that unless we find Christ within, we will not find him among the poor, though we may be doing good to them in various ways. The two are reciprocal: the more we find Christ within, the more we become aware of Christ without.

Scripture (John 15: 1,4-5)
Jesus said, 'I am the true vine. Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in them, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.

Tuesday (Dorothy Day)
This work of ours towards a new heaven and a new earth shows a correlation between the material and the spiritual, and, of course, recognizes the primacy of the spiritual. Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul. Hence the leaders of the work must go daily to mass. And as our perceptions are quickened, and as we pray that our faith be increased, we will see Christ in each other. We must practice the presence of God. He said that when two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them.

Scripture (John 14:10-16)
Jesus said, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?' What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth.

Wednesday (A New Catechism)
It is easy to recognise that Jesus' prayer is always spoken of in connection with his mission. His withdrawal into the desert is described as a preparation for his task. Later he also took refuge in isolation, when the world tried to force a worldly Messiahship upon him. It shows how much we should reproach ourselves if we neglect our intercourse with God and devote *all* our time to work or charitable works. It is through prayer that the compass which directs our activities remains true.

Scripture (Luke 10:38-42)
Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Pleases tell her to help me." But the Lord answered "Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed, only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part."

Thursday (Jean Vanier)
Sharing the word can be a powerful means of piercing armours and routines to let the living waters flow. It can be a nourishment which brings strength, energy and a new hope. It is not words which are abstract, based on research or reason which can do this; it is those which reveal the faith, hope and love of the speaker. The talks which nourish come from people who allow God to speak through their lips.These talks come from the deep, hidden and silent places where God lives, to nourish those same places in the listeners.

Scripture (Romans 8:11, 14-17)
If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his spirit living in you. All who are guided by the Spirit of God are children of God. The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.