

Friday (St. Francis de Sales)

How is it with you as concerning your neighbour? Do you love each one cordially and for God's sake? In order to answer this you must call to mind sundry disagreeable, annoying people—for it is in such cases that we really practise the love of God with respect to our neighbour, especially towards them that do us wrong.

Examine whether your heart is thoroughly clear as regards all such and whether it costs you a great effort to love them. Are you quick to speak ill of your neighbours who do not love you? Do you act unkindly, directly or indirectly, towards them? A very little honest self-dealing will enable you to find this out.

Scripture (Revelation 3:20-22)

Look, I am standing at the door knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come to share a meal at that person's side. Anyone who proves victorious, I will allow to share my throne. Let anyone who can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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13th Week of Ordinary Time

Surprise visits

It's often quite easy to listen attentively to the Word of God in church, (distracted mind permitting), or when I manage to quieten distractions when I pray, but quite another to be open to God speaking in daily life. When Jesus finishes his uncompromising instructions to the apostles before sending them out in pairs to preach about the Kingdom, (Matthew 10:37-42) he turns his attention to how people will receive the Good News. I'd like to think that I would be completely open to listening to two apostles who turned up in my neighbourhood, but if I imagine living in one of the villages they visited, I'm not convinced I would recognise them as being from Jesus. I don't suppose Jesus' band of fishermen, tax collectors and assorted oddments (who weren't 'trained' Pharisees or Rabbis) were immediately obvious as men of God, especially when I think of the complaints against them for not observing rituals and against Jesus for not observing the Sabbath and being a little too cosy with sinners. In him, and in the apostles, God was working in a new way, and not everyone recognised it or was comfortable with it.

It would be wise of me to ask myself honestly: Do I welcome God openly and fully, or do I select what is comfortable? Do I welcome him into my life, or just as a general principal and worthy aim that don't quite become rooted in the everyday? Am I, in short, open to the way God comes, or do I stick with the familiar, the tried and trusted?

I can certainly learn a lot from the Shunammite woman who welcomes the prophet Elisha, (2 Kings 4:8-11,14-16). She is well off and is 'a woman of rank', and is clearly a good woman who offers hospitality to the passing stranger. At this point she has no idea that he is a man of God, or a man of influence, (she learns this about him over time). Clearly, her act is more than a one-off charitable act, as Elisha calls in whenever he is passing through. She is open to the needs of others, and so is open to God.

As she gets to know him more, she begins to suspect that he is a man of God. She then makes her house available to Elisha whenever he wants it and, I notice, in a way that would suit Elisha—the room allows him to work, eat and rest as he needs; there is no attempt to make him fit in with her ways. She certainly does not 'parade' him before the neighbours, (no big dinner party invitations with 'Oh, by the way you can meet this prophet I am particularly friendly with'!).

When Elisha's servant suggest she be rewarded, the woman turns down the offer to have any request put to the king (it's only now that she discovers that Elisha has influence in high places), but when Elisha promises her a son, even though her husband is old, the woman is sceptical, which reveals she still has much to learn about God.

It is worth reading the ups and downs of her story as her faith journey continues to develop, but I have much to learn from her even at this point. Do I make the Word of God welcome to do as it will? The welcome which Jesus looks for is from those who welcome the prophets and apostles for who they are, not for what they can do; it is from people who meet the needs of the apostles, (or whatever guise God takes this week), not their own needs. Am I as ready to be hospitable / welcome the stranger, the inconvenient, the one who is perhaps on a different path, (if not literally into the house, then by way of noticing needs and putting what I have at the person's disposal)? In short, do I invite God for tea, or build him a room?

Martin Bennett

Monday (Dorothy Day)

It was the custom in the first generation of Christians that a room was kept ready in the house for any stranger who might ask for shelter; not because the stranger reminded them of Christ, but because—plain and simple—he was Christ. It would be foolish to pretend that it is always easy to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome, with “alter Christus” shining in neon behind them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head and the moon under her feet, as St. John says, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God’s way for her, nor is it Christ’s way for himself, now when he is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.

Scripture (Matthew 10:40-42)

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet’s reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because they are upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, they will not go without their reward.

Tuesday (Mother Teresa)

I believe that we are not really social workers. We may be doing social work in the eyes of the people. But we are really contemplatives in the heart of the world, for we are touching the body of Christ twenty-four hours a day. We have twenty-four hours in his presence. You, too, try to bring that presence in your family. Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put into the action that we do.

Scripture (2Kings 4:8-10)

One day as Elisha was on his way to Shunem, a woman of rank who lived there pressed him to stay and eat there. After this, he always broke his journey for a meal when he passed that way. She said to her husband, ‘Look, I am sure the man who is constantly passing our way must be a holy man of God. Let us build him a small room and put a bed in it, and a table and a chair and a lamp. Whenever he comes to us he can rest there.’

Wednesday (Jean Vanier)

When a community is healthy, it acts like a magnet. When a community starts to be frightened of welcoming visitors and new people, when it starts to lay down restrictions and ask for guarantees, then it is no longer a community; it is becoming an efficient place of work. The health of a community can be measured by the quality of its welcome of the unexpected visitor, by the joy and simplicity of relationships between its members, by its creativity in response to the cry of the poor. But it is measured above all by the ardour for and fidelity to its own essential goals: its presence to God and the poor.

Scripture (Mark 6:1-5)

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, “Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom granted him, and these miracles worked through him? This is the carpenter’s son, surely, the son of Mary. His brothers and sisters, are they not here with us?”. And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is despised only in his own country.” And he could work no miracle there.

Thursday (Catherine de Hueck Doherty)

A day filled with noise and voices can be a day of listening to the voice of God if the noises becomes, for us, an echo of the presence of God, if the voices are, for us, messages and solicitations of God. Stand still and pray that the Holy Spirit may clear all the fears, selfishness, greed and narrow-heartedness away from the soul. This standing still can be done in the middle of the outward noise of daily living and the duties of life, for it will bring order into the soul, God’s order.

Scripture (1Thessalonians 2:13)

Another reason why we continually thank God for you is that as soon as you heard the word that we brought you as God’s message, you welcomed it for what it really is, not the word of any human being, but God’s word, a power that is working among you believers.