

Friday (Bede Griffiths)

The church was originally a community of the Spirit. People who received the gift of the Spirit dedicated their lives to prayer. Neither serving nor preaching is good if you are not praying. If you have not got Christ within, you cannot give him to others. You can put words and doctrines before people, but that is not preaching the Gospel. It is only when you have the Gospel and Christ within that you can communicate it to others.

Scripture(Galatians1:11-15)

Now I want to make it quite clear that the Gospel that was preached by me was no human message. It was not from any human being that I received it but it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ. You have surely heard how I lived in the past and how there was no limit to the way I persecuted the church of God. But God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb, called me through his grace and chose to reveal his Son in me so that I should preach him to the gentiles.

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21st Week of Ordinary Time

A church built on porous rock

Jesus' conversation with his disciples about who they think he is (Matthew 16:13-20) is a turning point for both Peter and Jesus: now that he is recognised as the Messiah, Jesus knows that there is a leader for the community he is founding,

The answers to 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' suggest that people recognise Jesus as someone special, and their sense of excitement – the list of prophets, the return of Elijah, Jeremiah, and the recently killed John the Baptist are all connected with the expectation of a forerunner to the Messiah's coming. In other words, there is a feeling that Jesus is the 'warm up' guy for the main act, but nobody thinks he is the Messiah. 'And what about you? Who do you think I am?' was a huge question for the apostles. We might expect them to know, having seen him walk on water, raise the dead to life, feed 5,000 etc, but Matthew's use of 'Son of Man' gives us a hint as to how big a leap this was for them: Daniel 7 talks of 'coming on the clouds of heaven, as it were a son of man.' and of an everlasting rule, with all peoples nations and languages being his servants' – a far cry from the wandering carpenter's son from Nazareth.

Peter's answer that Jesus is not only the Messiah but also the Son of the living God is a huge breakthrough, (God was expected to send a Messiah, but not a 'Son').

Significantly, Jesus does not say 'Simon, you are clearly very clever to work this out – that qualifies you to be leader'; he says, 'you are blessed.' It is God who has revealed this to Simon, not any human source. This was what qualified him to be the rock on which the church (the community of believers) would be built. Since Jesus will invest immense trust and power in Peter, ('I will give you the keys to the Kingdom'), God choosing rather than Peter earning is key to Jesus acting now.

There are plenty of examples in scripture where the leaders of God's chosen people have misused the power entrusted to them, using it for their own ends rather than God's. One example was Shebna, whose role was of particular significance because of the House of David's connection to the Messiah. In Isaiah 22:19-13, he is being sacked (by God) as Master of the Palace essentially, it seems, because his pride – he was something of a self-made man who worked his way into power, rather than being chosen, and this 'self-made man' attitude continued in office. God now chooses a more trustworthy servant, Eliakim, for the position. His role, and power, included being given the key to the House of David, controlling who had access to the King's palace. Jesus entrusting Peter with the keys to the Kingdom has a similar responsibility: having the keys and the authority of 'binding and loosing' emphasises that he, (and, later, the community) was being entrusted with God's authority and with his work. 'Binding and loosing' has three aspects: freeing people from the power of evil, (the term is used in exorcisms); accepting or excluding people from the community; and making definitive statements on what is authentic teaching. Clearly, he is being entrusted with a huge responsibility and power. If he had to go before an interview panel, no doubt his lack of theological training, his lack of experience in leadership and his rather impetuous nature would probably rule him out of such an important post, but God has clearly seen something else in Peter.

Any community built on this rock must be permeated by this memory, so that any leaders remain sensitive to God speaking and directing, and to remember where authority, at all levels, comes from and what it is for: to serve.

Martin Bennett

Monday (Jon Sobrino, SJ)

I want to say of Archbishop Romero that he believed in God just as Jesus did. As with Jesus, to be in communion with God, to speak with God and to speak about God meant above all for Romero making God's will real and effective. Like Jesus he sought and found God's will in the minutiae of everyday life as in life's most profound and significant moments. He never made of God's will something trivial or routine.

Scripture (Psalm 89:15-16, 20-21,24,26)

How blessed the nation that learns to acclaim you! They will live, Lord, in the light of your presence. In your name they rejoice all day long, by your saving justice they are raised up. I have found David my servant, and anointed him with my holy oil. My hand will always be with him, my arm will make him strong. My constancy and faithful love will be with him, in my name his strength will be triumphant. He will cry to me "You are my Father, my God, the rock of my salvation."

Tuesday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

False prophets in our time are the siren voices which help to create an atmosphere, a way of thinking. There is a growing realisation that our Western society has lost its direction and is losing confidence in the guides who have led from one disaster to another. I sense that people everywhere are longing for a new direction. That should not surprise us, for people are made for God. Without God human life remains an enigma. The deepest hopes and desires of the human heart remain unfulfilled.

Scripture (Matthew 16:13-17)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.'

Wednesday (H. Butterfield, 'History and Human Relations')

One of the most solemn facts in all history – one of the most significant for anyone who cares to ponder over it – is the fact that Jesus Christ was not merely murdered by hooligans in a country road; he was condemned by everything that was most respectable in that day, everything that pretended to be most righteous – the religious leaders, the authority of the Roman Government, and even the democracy itself which shouted to save Barabbas rather than Christ.

Scripture (Dt. 9:12-13,17-18)

When you have eaten all you want, when you have built fine houses to live in, when you have seen your silver and gold abound and all your possessions grow great, do not become proud of heart. Beware of thinking to yourself "My own strength and the might of my own hand have given me the power to act like this." Remember Yahweh your God; he was the one who gave you strength to act like this.

Thursday (Jean Vanier)

The people who carry final authority in a community are always, in a sense, alone. This loneliness is their cross, but it is also the guarantee of presence, light and the strength of God. That is why they, more than anyone else in the community, must have time to be alone with God. It is in these moments of solitude that inspiration is born in them and they will sense what direction to take. They must have confidence in these intuitions, especially if they are accompanied by a deep peace.

Scripture (Ephesians 2:7-10)

God raised us up with Christ to show for all ages to come, through his goodness towards us in Christ Jesus, how extraordinarily rich he is in grace. Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, not by anything of your own but by a gift from God; not by anything you have done, so nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated make up our way of life.