

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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GIFTS, NEEDS AND WANTS: Lent a Reappraisal

Sometimes the Lord speaks directly to us, sometimes in Scripture, in everyday occurrences but most often through others. As Lent approaches (Ash Wednesday, 5th March) it is time to reflect on our lives and to ponder how we can improve and grow in holiness and virtue. Both are a challenge for us in our human nature and perhaps even unwelcome. So we opt for those Lenten things that appear easier or are almost mechanical and habitual such as giving things up, going to more services, alms giving, fasting, all good in themselves but the challenge is or should be greater. The question is really how can I reach Easter purified and closer to Jesus.

Recently my Parish Priest quoted St Augustine to me – it was both challenging and beautiful and oh so rich and a few links formed in my mind and reflections followed on how hard it is to follow the Lords teaching. The quote was as follows;

*“Look at what the Lord has given you,
Take what you need
and give the rest away.”*

As I was in hospital I thought about this a great deal. What *do* we really need and for what? There are millions of things that the Lord has given us. How do we give things away- and what things? Is it possible to hoard earthly and spiritual goods, gifts and talents?

A link formed in my heart and mind.... So much of what is in the Gospel requires of us a stripping down to basics, a need to simplify what is essential to us and what are the frills and adages that we put on to cover our own insufficiencies. For example Jesus never said maybe or possibly. He never walked away from challenges to the truth with a fearful apprehension. He spoke the Truth in love and was understood by those who wished to hear, even the Pharisees understood Him – that’s why they rejected His Words. They were too uncomfortable for them. To accept them required changing which was costly.

No, He forgave unconditionally, healed totally and relinquished, stood aside from His Godness to make Himself as one of us – a totally selfless and kenotic (emptying out) of Himself. He knew who He was and what the Father had given Him but gave it away to His followers – He bade them heal in His name, evangelise in His name. Yet in giving away He gained the saving of the world. He gave all that He had so that we might gain ... but was the nature of that gain...? As He said ‘What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?’



“If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” These words given by Jesus to the rich young man go hand in hand with those of St Augustine.(Matt.19.21) often dismissed as impossible to do or minimised, diluted or even rejected, they are nevertheless crucial to our journey in life and throughout Lent.. The young man was wealthy. He was also a good man. He sought the Lord out. He kept the law but like all of us he kept things back, his treasures. Now we all have these. It may be a case of saying, yes, take everything but, not my health, my family, job, spouse. It may be comforts that we cling to, and we certainly have our comfort zones. So where does that leave that unconditional love of neighbour, self or God? We are conditional believers as long as our ‘feathers are not too ruffled’ we are happy to comply... yet the richness of grace thus becomes lost to us.

“With God every moment is the moment of beginning again.” Catherine Doherty

St Francis knew that he had to abandon all for Jesus and he had a large inheritance awaiting. Catherine Doherty found this call too great to resist and sold all she had and gave to the poor. Many others too followed Jesus in the same manner.

Now you may be thinking... 'But we cannot all do that, life goes on, we have families, needs etc.'.. All this is true and it is not easy to surrender to that degree... The Apostles and disciples knew the cost. But it is sometimes a call to be detached from all that prevents us from full commitment and union with God, Father Son and Spirit.

It is worthwhile pondering on what we really need?. If something is unnecessary should we keep it? Does someone require it more? Can I give it away or does it own me? If we cannot part with something, though innocent in itself, then we are not free as the article or thing, activity, person or belonging, binds us. That binding does not lead to a freedom which leads to greater faith in providence. What we often give away come back to us a thousandfold. If you have something 'unneeded' think about giving it away and if it is hard to do all the more reason to do so, or at least question why it matters so much. Is this not a good practice in Lent which may reveal more to us than we think?

If we extend these prayer filled thoughts we can also consider the things of the Spirit. Do we really need constant affirmation, pride of place, thanks, congratulations? Do we constantly need to be told how great we are? Can we instead give this praise and encouragement to others.. Some people are good at this others struggle. Are we always seeking to be loved and forget that God always loves us and we should give love away freely, spread it about like a wonderful blanket to all around us with little concern for holding on to it ourselves.

Poverty of Spirit, yes, blessed are the Poor in Spirit, blessed for they shall see God. What beautiful and awesome words. The Poor in Spirit are those that realise the few things really matter in the journey to God. They see God in all their actions for it is He who is their *focus* and so having His Face they see all that He has given and made as a Blessing and Joy. They see the poor as brothers and sisters, the lonely as needing comfort, those treated unjustly as in need of fair play, the ill in need of solace and all people in need of Love.

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Poverty of Spirit is a dynamic call to realise that we are all part of Gods plan and united. No one is more important than anyone else and each has his/her part to fulfil.. As Bl. John Henry Newman said: 'we each have a task allotted to us that only we can do'. Can we truly give up our false gods and false aspirations in favour of that special task allotted to us? Maybe the young man was not so much attached to his wealth as to the '*idea of being rich and well thought of*'. It was his banner and shield. What is ours? Is it that we belong to God and that nothing can be a barrier to His love for us just as we are, or that our love of Him and our neighbour exceeds all else. Only this is necessary: *That we act justly, Love tenderly/mercifully and walk humbly with our God. A motto for Lent?* H.H.



When preaching is faithful to the Gospel, the centrality of certain truths is evident and it becomes clear that Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, or self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or a catalogue of sins and faults. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others

Pope Francis 1 - Evangelii Gaudium

Refectory table

Lord Christ, we pray your mercy on our table spread,
 And what your gentle hands have given your men
 Let it by you be blessed: whate'er we have
 Came from the lavish heart and gentle hand,
 And all that's good is' thine', for 'thou' art good.
 And you that eat, give thanks for it to Christ,
 And let the words you utter be only peace,
 For Christ loved peace: it was himself that said,
 Peace I give unto you, my peace I leave with you.
 Grant that our own may be a generous hand
 Breaking the bread for all poor men, sharing the food.
 Christ shall receive the bread you give his poor,
 And shall not tarry to give you reward.

Alcuin, 8th Century

Feasts in March /Lent:

5th Ash Wednesday, 25th The Annunciation,
 1st St Davids, 7th Sts Perpetua and Felicity 8th,
 St John of God. 10th St John Ogilve , 17th St
 Patrick, 19th St Joseph.