

# Encouragement Encouragement

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## Longing and Listening...

THE HOST APOSTOLATE  
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There is a part of us that is always longing- Longing for better, things, peace, fulfilment, joy and happiness even financial security, health or a better home. The list is endless and our hopes and dreams differ from person to person. Yet there is a gap – a desire that everyone wishes to fill. It seems that the grass is greener elsewhere- and never in our garden. It is a rare person that is truly content with ‘their lot’ and who is grateful for it no matter what the circumstances of their lives are. But should we not as Christians look elsewhere to the source – to the giver of all things good for our security and peace?

It is indeed hard in times of distress and hardship or in those moments of grief, loss, illness or trial to actually live in the way that brings the reality of the Christian message of hope into being and we become true believers in the fullness of life in Jesus Himself.

St. Augustine said- ‘Our hearts are restless until they find a place in You’. ‘Profound’ words but are they mere platitudes for us to merely say ‘how nice’ or even ‘how true’ and yet not delve deeper into their real essence and meaning! We are wonderfully made and formed and chosen to be loved and to give Love. We are part of God’s great plan for saving Mankind from its own weakness and sin. We have been conjoined to Him from the beginning. We are part not just of His creation but part of His very essence. We are made in God’s image and likeness, words we once learnt and so easily forget. If we are part of God we will never be complete unless we recognise that part of us is always longing and waiting to be reunited with Him, for all time. That space deep within our souls and spirit yearns, like the Psalmist says ‘yearns for running streams so my soul yearns for you my God (Psalm 42).

This inner groaning for completeness and union is often filled by the search for the earthly satisfactions

and pleasures, as we grapple with the desire which seems not to be able to be satisfied. True we can find it in friendship, in community, in being part of the Body of Christ, Eucharistically or by faith, but there is that part of us that somehow seeks a super-natural reality and somehow cannot find it.

This is particularly acute at times of trial, pain as well as hardship. We seek the Lord, longing for that touch to heal our broken hearts and minds and yet He seems to be absent. This darkness – which can be a sense of loss of God or can be through the agonies of trials, each darkness different, can lead us to a sense

of isolation and aloneness. It can make us cry out ...’ where are you Lord now I need you – do you really exist? I don’t understand.... Quietly and seemingly unresponsive the Lord is working by our side- longing for us to call on His name. Without realising it we are in that special place where he cares for us all the more reaching

out to us with His abiding Love which is NEVER withdrawn and always present. There is a popular song called ‘Stand by me’ , ‘When the night is long and I stumble and fall and all is dark.. then stand by me , stand by me. That is or should be the cry of a soul in anguish. The Lord always stands by us. Many people are familiar with the picture of ‘footprints’ in the sand, times when we can only see one set of footprints He carries us.

Psalm 139 says: O Lord you search me and you know me.... You discern my purpose from afar... all my ways lie open to you (your gaze) I wonder if we really believe this? The Maker knows His creation. We are known, all of us, with all our weakness, yes our sins and failing and our strengths too but we are loved and forgiven... every breath we take is accounted for and planned. We should not feel rejected and abandoned for we are cared for. He is the Good Shepherd and He hears our call and gathers



Who except God can give peace? Has the world ever been able to satisfy the heart? St. Gerard Magella

us up in His arms. Recently through a dark period in my own life which seem to leave me with little of anything within – I found that it was the daily, almost unbelievably small blessings that came to my rescue, not the grand healings but small reassurances of presence and care.

But in order to be able to live in that darkness and let the light penetrate we have to look through the light which is there even if dimmed or the ‘blackout curtain’ seems to be closed. The voice of the Good Shepherd is still perceptible to those whom He loves – that is us! ‘My sheep know me and listen to My voice’. I heard recently that in times past the shepherds gathered all the sheep together, their own and others in a pen for safety – ‘safety in numbers’ so to speak and easier to guard. Each sheep had a name and the Shepherd could tell them apart. However with the first light of dawn the shepherds would call their own sheep and in the dispersal and muddle each sheep would run to its own special shepherd because they knew his voice and were not misled by the other voices. There was no straying at this point. After the darkness of the night they were glad to hear his voice.

And what of us? Do we listen to that still small voice of calm? Do we listen carefully enough to hear it and gather round the King of Shepherds, Jesus?

That voice - that inner knowing will not desert us but will lead us on. Longing should make us listen all the more attentively. In the Para-Olympics it was truly inspiring to see the fantastic way athletes dealt with their incapacities. But one event had me riveted and that was the downhill ski at seventy miles per hour by a blind Olympian. I was so dismayed that I thought that surely she must have a little sight? No one would attempt that with all the dangers involved, heights, speed, turns etc. But no, the skier, a young woman **was** totally blind. She had a leader who guided her. No, he did not escort his charge holding her by the arm, or slowly descending, but chased her down the slopes at tremendous speed. Their one aim was to get them both safely down and to win the race! How did this happen? They were in contact via an ear piece and radio transmitter. Directions were given – go left go right, hurry up, faster, bend etc. What incredible trust and confidence in the leader. But how could the skier obliterate the other sounds, cheering, the wind, sound of snow under foot... She herself said “I totally exclude all other sounds and focus **solely**, and with determination, on the voice of my guide”.

Is this not a wonderful image of what our relationship with Jesus should be? We should listen to Him, nay, lean on Him completely like the young St John, leaning on His shoulder, listening to His breath on and in us and those words to us.

As the *Special Pastor* said ‘lean on Jesus and use his strength.’... So our longing should be matched by our listening which indeed is praying. A downhill will then become a rising upward for the Leader knows what He is doing. Halina Holman

### **Pope Francis**

“God is looking for you, even if you do not seek Him. God loves you, even if you forget Him. God sees beauty in you, even if you think you have squandered all your talents in vain, “It may be that we too happen to walk on paths far from God, as happened to the prodigal son; or fall into a loneliness that makes us feel abandoned in the world; or, again, do wrong and are paralysed by a sense of guilt.

In those moments, one’s prayer should simply start by saying the word, “Father,” with the tenderness of a child who calls out “Dada” or “Abbà,” in the original Aramaic to call God “Father,” is to have the whole world of Jesus poured into one’s heart.” Rome Jan. 2016

“The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God, and God never ceases to draw man to Himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: (Catechism of the Catholic Church 27)

**‘Can He quench my thirst for ever?  
Will His Spirit strength impart?  
Yes, He gives me living water  
Springing up within my heart.’**

Christians are giving to the theme of Divine Mercy, a “sign of the times” that shows how, deep down, people still experience a need for God.

Pope Emeritus Benedict 2018

### **Feasts in February**

1<sup>st</sup> St Brigid

2<sup>nd</sup> **The Presentation of the Lord. Candlemas.**

3<sup>rd</sup> The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary time

5<sup>th</sup> St. Agatha 6<sup>th</sup> Ss. Paul Miki and Companions

10<sup>th</sup> Fifth Sunday in Ordinary time

11<sup>th</sup> **Our Lady of Lourdes (Wd. Prayer for Sick)**

14<sup>th</sup> Ss. Cyril and Methodius, St Valentine

17<sup>th</sup> Sixth Sunday in Ordinary time

21<sup>st</sup> St Peter Damien 22<sup>nd</sup> The Chair of St Peter

23<sup>rd</sup> St Polycarp

24<sup>th</sup> Seventh Sunday in Ordinary time

27<sup>th</sup> St Gabriel C.P.

28<sup>th</sup> St Oswald