

No.17

21st January 2021

Dear Friends,

Following our theme of developing our relationship with Jesus - with the emphasis on prayer and the importance of commitment to our discipleship - our spiritual passage this week comes from a book about St Thomas Aquinas - one of the greatest of Catholic thinkers in history. The passage explores our relationship with Jesus - based on Friendship and sharing the Divine Life - the life of grace.

We also have a reflection by Ann Bennell on the Hidden Years of Jesus and what this can say about our relationship with God.

Our Sunday Sermon from Bishop Robert Barron is quite hard hitting in facing the problems of leadership in religion - in Old Testament times and in our own day. The ultimate lesson is hopeful but not without great challenges.

Take care and God bless,

John de Waal.

Our Friendship with Jesus.

“The love of friends is only possible on the basis of fundamental equality of status between them.

In St John’s Gospel Jesus tells his disciples : ‘I do not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master’s business; I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father.’ (John 15 : 15)

In his lecture on this passage St Thomas explains that between God and human beings there can be no natural relations of friendship , because the inequality between God and creatures is as radical as any can be. It is infinite, that is, incalculable.

And it is worth noting that, for Thomas, this inequality is not in the first place the result of the Fall. The inequality between creature and Creator is even more “original” than any caused by original sin, and is such that God and human creatures cannot naturally share anything, above all they cannot share a common life.

Therefore, if Jesus proclaims that now his disciples are to be called “friends”, this can only be because in some way the radical inequality of Creator and creature has been overcome, because there is, as it were, a *new* creation, establishing a new order of relationship between God and human beings.

Since, however, there is no possibility of that inequality being leveled by action on the part of the creature, it must be that the initiative has been taken on the part of God, entirely gratuitously, to make human creatures thus equal to the divine, so that friendship becomes a possibility between them. Or as Thomas puts it : ‘Only God can make us god-like’. Thus Thomas provides the foundations of his doctrine of grace, the entirely free gift of friendship with God, the life of God shared in friendship with human beings.”

(From “Thomas Aquinas” by Denys Turner pp. 148 - 150).

The place of silence and quiet reflection in our relationship with Jesus.

Some thoughts from Ann Bennell.

During Advent and over Christmas, I returned to some reflections by the famous chef Delia Smith (A Feast for Advent), which I have over the years found helpful.

On 30th December, she reflects on “The Holy Family and the Hidden Life”. She draws our attention to the 30 years when The Holy Family lived and worked in Nazareth as something totally hidden from our view (except when Jesus stays behind in the temple), a time when Jesus was being filled “with wisdom and God’s favour” quietly and unobtrusively. Delia encourages us to look at an address given by Saint Pope Paul VI in 1964 entitled Reflections at Nazareth.

“Here (Nazareth), in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ. May the silence of Nazareth teach us recollection, inwardness, the disposition to listen to good inspiration and teaching of true masters. May it teach us the need for, and the value of, preparation, of study and of meditation, of personal inner life of prayer which God alone sees in secret.” In other words, we do not always have to be “doing” but simply “being” in the presence of God.

If in our busy lives we can find a time of silence and reflection, perhaps we can become channels of God’s grace to others. The full address can be read at or downloaded at [Papal Encyclicals Online – Reflections at Nazareth Pope Paul VI 1964](#).

I found reading this address very useful.

Ann Bennell

Bishop Robert Barron's Sunday Sermon.

To appreciate this sermon you may wish to read : 1 Samuel 3:3-10 & 19.

<https://youtu.be/zgmylFJNzPc>

Final Prayer - taken from Compline (the Night Prayer of the Church).

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Nunc Dimittis.

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles and give glory to Israel, your people.

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

A short time for silent prayer.

Concluding prayer.

Lord our God,
restore us again by the repose of sleep after the fatigue of our daily work; so that, continually renewed by your help, we may serve you in body and soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing. Lord, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

A final thought.

“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the Divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

(prayer at the Offertory of the Mass).

