

Thought for the Day: 4–10 May 2020

(by Stephane McCarthy)

Monday 4 May

These two pieces of writing complement each other beautifully. I think of them as a shining pathway and hope you take encouragement from them, too: the 'what we need to do' and the 'how to do it'. The great thing, of course, is that the Kingdom of God – a kingdom of love - is already here, in each of us. And our obedience is not some slavish thing but, on the contrary, it leads us to true freedom and joy. Obedience is not some huge mountain to climb, something unpleasant; it is simply our acceptance of the ordinary, everyday circumstances we find ourselves in, and the following of our consciences, thereby living each moment with God.

'Complete freedom from fear is one of those things we owe wholly to Our Lord. To be afraid is to do him a double injury. First, it is to forget him, to forget that he is with us, that he loves us and is himself almighty, and second it is to fail to bend to his will. If we shape our will to his, as everything that happens is either willed or allowed by him, we shall find joy in whatever happens, and we shall never be disturbed or afraid. So, then, we should have faith that banishes all fear. Beside us, face-to-face with us, within us, we have Our Lord Jesus, our God whose love for us is infinite, who is himself almighty, who has told us to seek the Kingdom of God and that everything else will be given to us.' **Charles de Foucauld**
1858 - 1916

'Through obedience we transcend our own limitations and align ourselves with God's will, which, with infinite wisdom and prudence, guides us to do what is best. Moreover, as we



become filled with the divine will, which no created thing can resist, so we become stronger than all others. This is the path of wisdom and prudence, this is the one way by which we can come to give God the highest glory. After all, if there had been another, better way, Christ would certainly have shown us, by word and by example. But scripture wraps up his life in Nazareth with the words 'And he was obedient to them', and it shows the rest of his life to be passed in similar obedience – almost as an instruction to us – by showing how he came to earth to do the Father's will.' **Maximillian Kolbe 1894 – 1941**

Tuesday 5 May

Following on from yesterday's theme of a pathway, here is St Therese's way. A French Carmelite nun who died aged only 24, but the impact of her life and writings have been spectacular. Ever since, it can't be a coincidence that multitudes of spiritual people of every religion have been 'crazy' about her, as the Americans would say, because we can all relate to Therese's little way of being carried as a child by God.

'I have always desired to be a saint, but in comparing myself with the saints I have always felt that I am as far removed from them as a grain of sand, trampled underfoot by the passer-by, is from the mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds... I have concluded that God would not inspire a wish which could not be realised, and that in spite of my littleness, I might aim at being a saint. 'It is impossible', I said, 'for me to become great, so I must bear with myself and my many imperfections'. But I will seek out a means of reaching heaven by a little way – very short, very straight, and entirely new.

There are lifts which save us the trouble of climbing stairs. I will try to find a lift by which I may be raised to God, for I am too small to climb the steep stairway of perfection.

'I looked in Scripture to find some suggestion of what the lift I wanted might be. I came across these words from the Book of Proverbs: 'whoever is a little one, let that person come to me'.

(Proverbs 9. 4). I, therefore, drew near to God, feeling sure I had discovered what I was looking for. But I wished to know more about what God would do to the 'little one'. So, I continued my search and this is what I found: 'You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees: as one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you (Isaiah 66. 12-13). Never have I been consoled with more tender or sweet words. Jesus, your arms, then, are the lift which must raise me to Heaven. To reach Heaven I need not become great. On the contrary, I must remain little. I must become even smaller than I am.' **St Therese of Lisieux (de l'enfant Jésus) 1873 – 1897**



Wednesday 6 May

Having quoted the 'little' Therese yesterday, I have to quote the 'big' Carmelite, Theresa, today, whom Forbes so brilliantly mentioned last week. Jesus relies on each of us now, personally! And going further back, this beautiful piece from Julian of Norwich, the great English mystic. Again, the theme of our smallness and vulnerability, and total dependence for our existence on God's love. Even what seems to be the almost infinite size of our physical universe is merely like the size of a crumb compared to God. But because God loves us, we do not need to fear anything. His love is for eternity.

'Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world.' **St Theresa of Avila 1515 – 1582**



'Then he showed me a little thing, no bigger than a hazelnut, as it seemed to me, lying in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: 'What can this be?' And

I was answered generally: 'It is all that I made.' I gazed with astonishment wondering how it could survive because of its littleness. It seemed to me that it was about to fall into nothingness. And I was answered in my mind: It lasts and always will last because God loves it.' And so everything receives its being from the love of God. In this little thing I saw three truths: God made it. God loves it. God keeps it.' **Julian of Norwich 1342 – 1416**

Thursday 7 May

A lovely prayer today from Thomas Merton, which I personally often relate to! And some interesting thoughts from Basil Hume, whose sensitivity and insight I think we can draw much comfort and encouragement from.

'My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that

desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust you always... **Thomas Merton 1915 – 1968**

'One can say further that in every human life there is a sadness or difficulty from which the person would gladly be free. There are, too, considerable crises of one kind or another. We call these 'crosses' and know from the Scriptures that carrying the Cross is a condition of discipleship. We know, too, that the 'grain of wheat must die...' We are familiar with the concept that a burden, carried as a cross, can become light. Many, however, do not derive this consolation – they become overwhelmed... Constantly, God allows us to be buffeted by events and persons... Sometimes it is just that God seems very remote – and that can be a great burden. In the process of growing older and by the application of common sense we learn to adjust to situations, and learn to take to ourselves advice we know we ought to give – and would give – to others. We learn to cope with problems and to become less vulnerable. However, we should go further, and in suffering see flashes of enlightenment and our growth in our life hidden with Christ. We should recognise 'golden moments': 'when I am weakest, then I am strongest'.



*There is a gentle breeze if we can but catch it, which blows all the time to help us on our journey through life to our final destination. That breeze is the Holy Spirit. But the wind cannot be caught or used unless the sail is hoisted and the hoisting is our task. We must be on the watch, ready to recognise it and play our part. God does hold us, and will lead us, if we want it; but we must want it.' **Basil Hume 1923 – 1999***

Friday 9 May

Today, some wonderful reflections from Thomas Keating and Richard Rohr, who I would describe as modern-day mystics because of the huge part they have played in re-establishing the contemplative approach to life – which had been mostly lost sight of for the last 500 years – which is doing good to us all and to our planet.

'This Presence is so immense, yet so humble, awe-inspiring yet so gentle, limitless, yet so intimate, tender and personal. I know that I am known. Everything in my life is transparent in this Presence. It knows everything about me – all my weaknesses, brokenness, sinfulness – and still loves me infinitely. This Presence is healing, strengthening, refreshing – just by its Presence. It is non-judgemental, self-giving, seeking no reward, boundless in compassion. It is like coming home to a place I should never have left, to an awareness that was somehow always there, but which I did not recognise.'

'We consent to God's presence, letting God decide what he wants us to do. God seems to want to find out what it is like to live human life in us, and each of us is the only person who can ever give him that joy. Hence our dignity is incomparable. We are invited to give God the chance to experience God in our



humanity, in our difficulties, in our weaknesses, in our addictions, in our sins. Jesus chose to be part of everyone's life experience, whatever that is, and to raise everyone up to divine union.' **Thomas Keating
1923 - 2018**

'Prayer is about changing you, not about changing God. Most simply put, as we've seen, prayer is something that happens to you (Romans 8. 26-27), much more than anything you privately do. It is an allowing of the Big Self more than an

assertion of the small self. Eventually, you will find yourself preferring to say, 'Prayer happened, and I was there' more than, 'I prayed today.' All you know is that you are being loved, being used, being prayed through – and you are no longer in the driver's seat. God stops being an object of attention like any other object in the world, and becomes at some level your own 'I am.' You start knowing through, with, and in Somebody Else. Your little 'I Am' becomes 'We Are.' Please trust me on this. It might be the most important thing I am saying in this book.' ' **Richard Rohr – The Naked Now**

Saturday 9 May

As we begin to approach Pentecost, Henri Nouwen, one of our other contemporary spiritual masters, explains why it is such an important and crucial feast. It is followed by a wonderful prayer by Matthias Scheeben, the great German theologian, sweeping us up and showing us a glimpse of Heaven.

'For most of us Pentecost is a non-event. While on secular calendars Christmas and Easter are still marked, Pentecost is spectacularly absent.

But Pentecost is the coming of the Spirit of Jesus into the world. It is the celebration of God breaking through the boundaries of time and space and opening the whole world for the re-creating power of love. Pentecost is freedom, the freedom of the Spirit to blow where it wants.

Without Pentecost, the Christ-event – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – remains imprisoned in history as something to remember, think about, and reflect on. The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now.



Pentecost lifts the whole mystery of salvation out of its particularities and makes it into something universal, embracing all peoples, all countries, all seasons, and all eras. Pentecost is also the moment of empowering. Each individual human being can claim the Spirit of Jesus as the guiding spirit of his or her life. In that Spirit we can speak and act freely and confidently with the knowledge that the same Spirit that inspired Jesus is inspiring us.' **Henri Nouwen 1932 – 1996**

May the love of the Holy Spirit, which can never fall away, the love which forms the bond between heaven and earth, between yearning anticipation and blissful vision, the love that surpasses understanding and even now plunges us into the depths of the heart of God, raise us up with its heavenly power to the bosom of 'the Father of Lights', that together with his Son we may behold him face-to-face, and may 'be like to him, because we shall see him as he is', and as we ourselves 'are known by God.' **Matthias Scheeben 1835 – 1888**

Sunday 10 May

Following on from Matthias Scheeben yesterday, I would like to finish today with a piece of writing – The Vision – from Fr Michael Garvey, who was headmaster when I was at St Edmund's college, Puckeridge. We became friends later on when he was chaplain for the Carmelite sisters in Ware. He was a special person, one of the most inspirational Christians I have ever known, and yet he was always completely grounded with a tremendous sense of humour.

'The vision is of a church – that is a Christian people – fulfilling Christ's command to go out to the whole world, spreading the good news, baptising in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The vision is of Christians who look at the world through the eyes of Christ. People who see a world full of people made in the image and likeness of God; vast numbers of whom do not know him, do not know of his love for them, do not know of his goodness and generosity and compassion and forgiveness; people who desperately need his help, and sense of his presence.



The vision is of a church consisting of people who live in an expanding spiral of love. A spiral of love which begins with the recognition of love in a couple – a love which enables them to grow – a love which is creative, as God's love is

creative – and spreads to a family. From the family, the spiral of love widens into a local community of friends who recognise the presence of Christ among them and reflect his love in the love they have for one another.

The vision is of a church - that is, a people united by the life of Christ within them – nourished by the sacraments, signs of his presence, who are animated by leaders who guide them in the way of gospel values, so that they bring into being the vision of Christ.

The vision is of a community of persons whose love is a magnet which draws others to them – those in need of love – the poor, the sick, the disabled, the sinner, the prisoner, the wounded in heart – a community in which they find healing and peace.

The vision is of a world which becomes aware of these communities, which is touched by their love, a world whose standards and goals are influenced by that love, so the structure of society is underpinned by love, by care and responsibility for one's neighbour.

*The vision is of that spiral of love expanding to embrace the whole world, which becomes Christ's kingdom – a kingdom which he presents to his Father, whose love is the foundation of it all. **Michael Garvey 1925 – 2002***