

Meditation A reading from the Gospel according to St Luke 6: 12 - 16

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 4

“Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord.”

- 1 When I call, answer me, O God of justice;
from anguish you released me, have mercy and hear me.
- 2 It is the Lord who grants favours to those whom he loves;
the Lord hears me whenever I call him.
- 3 “What can bring happiness?” many say.
Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord
- 4 I will lie down in peace and sleep comes at once,
for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus, you choose us and call us as you did the Apostles. May we be willing disciples, always trusting, with daily prayer, that you will lead us in the way we should go. **Amen**

Commentary For September

A friend told me the other day that in 1923 his grandfather went into the railway station in Cork and was struck by the three clocks that he noticed on the station wall – all telling different times! He was puzzled and asked the Station Master why the times were all different. ‘Well, it’s like this’, the Station Master replied. ‘What’s the point of having three clocks if they all tell the same time?’ The man missed the train!!

What is the point of God creating us if we are all the same? I think that we should give thanks for our individuality, culture and background. The fact that we are all different means that we can bring variety to the world. It could be easy to say, ‘I have nothing to contribute to society, I am not clever enough, too young or too old!’ Each and everyone of us has something that only you and I can do and give. If we fail to celebrate our uniqueness and our valuable contribution to the community, then we miss the train of life.

In St Luke’s gospel we hear of Jesus calling the oddest bunch of disciples to follow him. Why? Because they were all unique and different and they had something enormously important to contribute to the mission of Jesus Christ building up his Church – so do you.

Canon David Hoggood, Portsmouth Cathedral

Commentary For October

Giant turtles on the Galapagos Islands live for 200 years and beneath their thick, thick shells, they are pretty safe from anything the world can throw at them.

A few years ago, when the first tourists arrived, forest fires broke out and changed dramatically their traditional habitat. The smart turtles recognised something new had arrived, stuck their necks out, moved to safe areas and survived. The other turtles did what they had always done when danger threatened, retreated to their shells, waited for the threat to go away - and perished.

We all get very used to a particular way of doing things. Most of us hate change and most especially when it affects the routine or way we live our lives. But nothing ever stands still. God sent his son Jesus into our world that we might have the trust and courage to face change. In his Gospel, Luke recalls how Jesus sent his disciples out like lambs among wolves, carrying no purse or bag or sandals – they had to break their routine and go where they had never been before. These were smart men and women. Like the turtles, they survived! As Christians, the Lord calls us to reach beyond our comfort zones and not bury our heads in the sand.

Canon David Hoggood, Portsmouth Cathedral

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

Chapter 1: Prayer

"Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God"

(Luke 6:12; NJB)

LISTEN & REFLECT

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (6: 12-19)

Now it happened in those days that he went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

In most religions mountains are the places where heaven and earth meet, and where people meet God. They are especially places where the divine is present and shows itself (theophany). Mountaintops, so often hidden in the clouds, are places of mystery.

Mountains have a special place in the life of Jesus. He often goes up a mountain to pray to his Father (Matthew 14, Luke 6 and 9). For Matthew especially, the ministry of Jesus is framed by two events involving mountains. At the beginning of his public life, Satan offers Jesus power over the whole world (Matthew 4). At the end of it Jesus confers on his disciples the powers which he has received from his Father, in Matthew 28: *"Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out to Galilee, the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some had hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."* Between these two events, he climbs a mountain in order to teach the crowd and his disciples (Matthew 5): *"Seeing the crowds, he went on to the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them."*

It is on a mountain that the Transfiguration took place. *"Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured."* (Matthew 17).

For Luke, "going up" to Jerusalem represents the triumphal way to the crucifixion — the climb to "the Mount of Olives". There he is hailed as a king, as he arrives mounted on a donkey, and the people spread their garments in his path (Luke 19). Soon afterwards, as

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if to demonstrate the inconstancy of the crowd, he climbs the Mount of Olives again, but this time to be crucified.

We in our turn are invited to go up to the mountain of the Lord. The mountaineer or mountain walker knows how hard the climb will be, but he is already focused on the summit. He knows that he must cut down the weight he carries as much as possible and that his rations must be light but high in energy. And he knows that he will need a guide he can trust.

It is the same when we start to pray. We know it will be difficult but contemplating the living God, however imperfectly, fills us with happiness. What can we leave behind, in order to lighten our load? Certainly not our fellow humans — that would not be Christian prayer. Each one of us must discover what weighs him down, what impedes his progress. The food for our journey is of course the communion bread of the Eucharist, but it is also the nourishment we obtain from communion with our fellows, because all prayer has a communal aspect. And ultimately our companion and guide is Christ himself. *“And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.”* (Matthew 28: 20).

SEE

‘After 36 years in the priesthood it is becoming clearer and clearer to me why so many couples are morally and physically sick — why so many do not achieve the harmony unity and happiness which they hoped for — why Christians are so deeply divided, both in theory and in practice. It is because people do not understand how important prayer is. When individuals or societies do not tie themselves to God through prayer, they are at the mercy of the forces of discord. Lack of time or inspiration, the demands of work or of the apostolate are all put forward as excuses. What nonsense! What would you think of a mother who says she has no time to eat because her two children are sick and she is overwhelmed by household chores...?’

Is praying any less important than eating? In other words, by not praying we risk serious damage to our moral and spiritual health. On the other hand the person who prays finds mental equilibrium, happiness and the power of love. I am in no doubt that prayer is just as vital for you the laity as for us priests. I am not talking about quick spoken morning or night prayers, but about what is known as meditation — the lifting up of the mind and heart to God.

I know so many Christians, members of the Équipes Notre Dame, who every day, in spite of the heavy demands of work family and the apostolate, devote a quarter of an hour, half an hour or even more to prayer. I can tell you that these people experience a daily renewal in their whole Christian life — in their moral and physical well-being, their married life and in all their various activities. And to my great delight I know that through this daily exercise some of them attain that continuous prayer which St Paul, echoing Jesus, recommends: *“pray constantly; and for all things give thanks; this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thessalonians 5, 17-18)

You should find an additional incentive to pray in thought of all those couples throughout

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the world who are unhappy, sick at heart or depressed, lacking the graces with which you, as members of the Équipes Notre Dame, are so richly endowed. You can help some of them directly, but so many others — so very many — can only be reached by your prayers. You may protest that it is for Carmelites and Trappist monks to pray. True, but for a start there are not very many of them, and in the realm of prayer, as in the apostolate, it is primarily for like to help like.

I cannot believe that a couple who do not feel a responsibility to their fellows have a very deep Christian faith — if they do not feel the need to pray for couples who are unaware of God's plan for love and marriage nor consider that there are couples somewhere in the world whose spiritual well-being has been given into their charge.

We often talk about "grown-up Christians". Grown-up Christians and grown-up couples are those who willingly feel and know that they are responsible for their fellows. They are those who have realised that they have a vacation to pray for others, and accept it willingly in the same way as they do the duties of their apostolate.

In these times of marital and family breakdown, when so many married people, whether consciously or not, mock God's plan for marriage, it is important that Christian couples should come together, united before God. Knowing that individually they are powerless to achieve the renewal of marriage on a global scale, they must adopt a life of prayer and intercession, asking God to do what they cannot do without his help.

If the Équipes Notre Dame, spread over some 35 different countries, do not constitute such a power of intercession, they play false to one of the primary reasons for their existence. They would become nothing more than groups of privileged people. And history teaches us that one day a tide will come and sweep away those who unite to defend and foster a privileged position.

Some of you are so well aware of all this that you have been asking for contemplative prayer to be made obligatory for all couples in the Movement, not just those in positions of responsibility. I do not think it is necessary to impose additional obligations. But what I do know is that if after two or three years in a team the couples of the Équipes Notre Dame do not make a place for prayer and their lives of their own accord, then they have not understood much about Christian life or their spiritual responsibilities.

Perhaps you will protest that it is not easy to pray. Prayer is both a science and an art. Someone who wants to learn to touch type will spend weeks practising. Someone who can play Beethoven sonatas will have tortured his next-door neighbours for years. You have to learn to pray — and you never finish learning.

I hope that in the coming year, helped by your teams, each one of you will learn to pray better — in other words, to love God better.' (H. CAFFAREL, "Veillez et Priez", Lettre mensuelle END 1/1966.)

EVALUATE

' My secret is exceedingly simple. I pray. Through prayer I become united in love with Christ. I know that to pray to him is to love him. In reality there is only one true prayer, one meaningful prayer: Christ himself. Only one voice goes up from the surface of the

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Earth: the voice of Christ. Perfect prayer is not composed of a multitude of words, but of a fervent longing which lifts the heart to Jesus.

Enjoy praying. Cultivate a need to pray all day long. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is big enough to receive God's gift, which is himself. Ask, seek, and your heart will grow until it can welcome him and keep him as your own.

God speaks in the silence of the heart. If you come before God in silence and in prayer, he will speak to you. Then you will understand how insignificant you are. It is only when you come to understand your own nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with himself. The souls of those who excel in prayer are very silent places.

Silence shows us a different aspect of things. The soul can only be reached through silence. It is not what we say but what God says that is important — what he says to us and what he says through us. In this kind of silence he will listen to us. In this kind of silence he will speak to our souls, and we will hear his voice.

Before you speak, remember that you must listen and that it is only then, from the very bottom of a receptive heart, that you can speak and God can hear you.

To be alone with him, not in our books our thoughts or our memories, but in perfect abnegation; to stand in his presence in silence, empty, still, waiting.

True prayer is union with God, a union as life-giving as that of the grapes and the grapevine in the image which Jesus uses in St John's Gospel. We need prayer. We need this union to bear fruit. That fruit is the work of our hands.

To be fruitful prayer must come from our hearts and must be able to touch the heart of God.' (Mother Teresa. "There is no greater love". Lattes 1997.)

ACT

'I know from experience that if I do not begin my day by reading a passage of the Gospel, I am lost. I read the passage and I start with a simple prayer and a reflection on what I have read. I study the text and I take hold of one little phrase. It may be something as simple as "hope succeeds". I write it in red ink in my notebook. As a result I keep coming across it all through the day.

Prayer is the centre, the heart and the strength of our faith. For us Christians, prayer is far more than the repetition of a set of words. Prayer is what we do on waking in the morning — on rising from our beds.

Some of my acquaintances get up an hour earlier in order to pray or to go to church. I admire them. Making an effort to meet Christ every morning is a wonderful thing to do. St Vincent De Paul once said "give me a man of prayer — he will be a superb man of action."

Without prayer we merely exist. When people ask me how I survive, with such a difficult job as the support of my young people, I reply that I enjoy 60 days of silence every year, including a five-day retreat in Algeria. It is from this that I draw my strength. It is the heart and centre of my life.

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When I was at the seminary our masters used to say to us young colts (for such we were): "If you are not first and foremost men of prayer, you will be mere men of action". They were trying to tell us that if our actions, our deliberations and even the help we gave one another were not grounded in prayer, then we were not putting our hearts into it. By contrast the man of prayer is given strength by the time devoted to praying.

Without prayer we merely exist. Prayer is at the heart of every apostolate. It is a special moment which you will only experience if it has become as necessary to you as your morning cup of coffee. This coffee will keep you awake throughout the day and will give you a strength beyond your dreams.

An impulse of the heart. About half an hour is just right. After that I am set up for the day. All I do is say to the Lord "Now, take possession of me".

Hang on to your daily prayer. Let it come naturally. Shadows are seductive and draw us in. It takes willpower to put them aside and to pray one's rosary.

For myself, I like to pray while driving. (There's nothing against it in the Highway Code.) I turn off the music or the radio (not an easy thing to do as there is so much of interest to listen to). Then I say the rosary and I tune in to a new savour, a very high frequency transmission and I am inspired....

Mind you, I'm not saying that I experience great revelations every time I pray. Prayer rarely brings illumination. No, I just hang in there, and then I am suffused with a great happiness.

It is my date with God. I cannot do without it.

You will find strength and a secret joy through your morning prayer. Maybe you will keep it up for a few days and then abandon it, but I think that you will very soon feel the lack of it. It is a grace which is difficult to attain. Ask God for the grace of prayer, and once you have it, never let it go! (Père G. GILBERT, *Rallumez le feu.*). Fr Guy Gilbert devoted his life to the rehabilitation of young offenders.

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

1. We suggest you discuss between yourselves the current state of your relationship with the Lord – what stage are we at individually? How can we help each other to move forward in this relationship?
2. Talk to each other about how you pray – when, where and for how long? What aids do you use? How do you deal with distractions?

Questions for the team meeting

3. What thoughts did we have on reading this chapter, and what memories did it evoke? What have we gained from it?
4. What new horizons has it opened up for us? What still remains to be done?