



Blessed Be

December 2015

Welcome back to our spirituality resource which we are currently sending with the Australian Grail Newsletter. In it, we hope you'll find something for your contemplation, ideas to think about, prayers to use and possibilities for further reading. We will be publishing another edition around Easter, and if you have anything pertaining to the season (or any other season) that you wish to contribute, we would welcome it, so please contact us at helenimacauley@gmail.com

It is now the season of Advent and Christmas, when we await and celebrate the birth of Jesus, the revelation of God amongst us, and look forward with hope to a new year.

Andrea Venier sent these thoughts of Hildegard of Bingen:

For this is the wisdom-woman of God.

She watches over all people and all things. She is of such radiance and brightness, that you cannot gaze on her face or on the garments she wears.

For she is awesome in terror and gentle in goodness.

She has the radiance of divinity in her face.

She is with all and in all and of beauty so great

That no one can know how sweetly she bears with people,

And with what unfathomable mercy she treats them.

(From Hildegard of Bingen, *Seeking God* in Mary T. Malone, *Praying with the Women Mystics*, p.65.

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Advent 2015 ushers in the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. Also from Andrea comes this reflection on mercy and the following prayer:

The greatest obstacle for people of faith, as the great St Thomas Aquinas noted, is the question 'Why do good people suffer?'. This question becomes the foundation for the accusation against the existence of a loving God that many an atheist has triumphantly employed. The accusation is premised on an assumption that because God's is the hand behind all creation, then God is the reason why suffering exists.

We've speculated answers over the years: to teach us, to punish us, or so that we will be less reliant on ourselves and more reliant on God. The fact is, none of these responses satisfies. There are only three things we know for certain about suffering: that it won't last forever for those who accept God's mercy ; that God wishes us to address suffering in the world (see Matthew 25); and that God entered into this world of suffering by becoming one of us in an overwhelming act of mercy and solidarity.

Pope Francis chose December 8, 2015, to open the Year of Mercy because that day marks the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II. Just as this Council looked to renew the church, Francis is proclaiming that mercy is the key to the church's continuing renewal in this 'new phase of her history'. Francis called mercy 'the very foundation of the church's life and credibility'. He said, 'Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy'.

'Mercy' means 'to come to the aid of another out of a sense of relationship'. There is no better way to spend Advent than to let mercy fill our minds and grow in our hearts. As we await the coming of the Lord, we are also engaged in active waiting for the time when all the persons and nations on earth will grow into relationship with one another encouraging mutual help instead of competition and conflict. Then the kingdom of God will have come!

Prayer

God of Mercy, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

(Adapted from www.thefaceofmercy.org.au and www.gpbs.com.au)

Alison Healey offers this vision of Judy Chicago:

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many

And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

(From the installation artwork, *The Dinner Party*, 1979)

Also from Alison:

Fire in the earth

It is done.
Once again the Fire has penetrated the earth.
Not with the sudden crash of thunderbolt,
riving the mountain tops:
does the Master break down doors to enter his own home?
Without earthquake, or thunderclap:
the flame has lit up the whole world from within.

All things individually and collectively
are penetrated and flooded by it,
from the inmost core of the tiniest atom
to the mighty sweep of the most universal laws of being:
so naturally has it flooded every element, every energy,
every connecting link in the unity of our cosmos,
that one might suppose the cosmos to have burst
spontaneously into flame.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ)

From Sheila Hawthorn:

Ceaseless Hope

You must be men and women of ceaseless hope,
because only tomorrow
can today's human and Christian promise be realised;
and every tomorrow will have its own tomorrow, world without end.
Every human act, every Christian act, is an act of hope.
But that means you must be men and women of the present;
you must live this moment – really live it, not just endure it
because this very moment, for all its imperfection and frustration,
because of its imperfection and frustration,
is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities,
is pregnant with the future,
is pregnant with love,
is pregnant with Christ.

(Walter Burghardt)

Behold the Holy One

Let us be attentive,
Let us open our minds and our hearts
To hear the Good News.
O Life is Holy,
Life is Sacred,
Holy is the essence of all things.
Matter is Holy,
Matter is Sacred,
Behold the Holy One.
O praise to the Holy hidden in all things.
Praise for Sister Matter the dwelling-place of Spirit.
Praise for water and soil and fire elements imbued with soul.
Praise for creatures great and small whose being reflects the Divine.
Praise for trees and shrubs and grass with whom holy breath we exchange.
Praise for the sacred universe in whom all beings share communion.
Praise for mother earth our home; the fruit of her flesh becomes our own.
Praise for the Holy hidden in all things.

(Jan Novotka)

And finally, Helen Macauley writes: Given recent events, it is worth, in this season of peace, remembering the words of Swami Vivekananda:

As different streams,
having their sources in different places,
all mingle their water in the sea,
so, O Lord,
the different paths which our human family takes
through different tendencies,
various though they appear,
crooked or straight
all lead to Thee.

I'd like to thank everyone who has helped to get this publication started this year: all the contributors, the people who edited and advised (Alison Healey, Anne Day and Denise O'Hara), Marian Kelly for her artistic input and the readers who have given such positive feedback. Wishing you all a blessed Christmas and a fruitful New Year. And as the Navajo would say:

May the sun bring you energy by day.
May the moon restore you by night.
May the rain wash away your worries.
May the breeze blow life to your being.
May you walk gently in the world.
May you see its beauty all the days of your life.

