

Hints of Heaven



Psalm 139

If Heaven is being with God is and Hell is being without God, then Psalm 138 is Heaven's theme song.

It has also been called 'The Sinner's Lament' - you can't get away from God to do a few sneaky sins on your own!

I think it's more than that: it's the realisation that God is always there - if we want Him. He has given us the choice and He accepts our choice. If we want Him, He is there, whenever, wherever, whatever, always: if we turn our back and go our way, then he is sad but accepts our choice.

Psalm 139 (Part 1)

O Lord, you search me and you know me,
you know my resting and my rising,
you discern my purpose from afar.
You mark when I walk or lie down,
all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue
you know it, O Lord, through and through.
Behind and before you besiege me,
your hand ever laid upon me.
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,
too high, beyond my reach.

O where can I go from your spirit,
or where can I flee from your face?
If I climb the heavens, you are there.
If I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn
and dwell at the sea's furthest end,
even there your hand would lead me,
your right hand would hold me fast.

Meditation: *(Taken from 'Breaking the Rules' by Eddie Askew.)*

P.D. JAMES writes the best detective stories I know. Actually, that comment is less than fair to her. She writes fine novels, full of deep observation of people and their ways, and crime just happens to be the focus for her stories.

In "The Black Tower", a ten-year-old boy is talking to an old priest. The priest is sitting at his desk, his diary in front of him.

"It's just an ordinary diary, then?" asks the boy. "It isn't about your spiritual life?"

"This is the spiritual life," the priest answers gently, "the ordinary things one does from

hour to hour."

Some of us spend so much time and energy trying to be "spiritual". Choosing our words, our attitudes, with care.

It's as though we daren't be ourselves; as though the only way to please God was to lose identity, to become production line Christians, all in the same mould.

If we do this we're also in danger of trying to squeeze God out of "ordinary" life, as though there were bits of it he wasn't supposed to be in. Pigeonholing doesn't work. God has to be in everything we do, or he'll end up being in nothing.

The "spiritual life" is our ordinary life, lived with Jesus. It's not a separate entity, a front parlour we keep for special occasions. It's our day to day attitudes and actions, lived out in love. I heard a Christian say recently, "God's not just in prayer meetings and conventions, but in chips and peas." He connects with life as we know it.

The most "spiritual" people I've met, in the sense of being close to God, and living with him, show a worldly awareness that means they are in touch with life as it really is. And, because of that, are competent and effective in the way they live it.

A question

to help us in our personal reflection:

How's my spiritual life? Do I keep it for special occasions, or do I live it every day in the 'chips and peas' of ordinary life?

Prayer:

Lord, give me the courage to be myself today.

To live life as it comes, welcoming it, and saying 'yes' to everything.

You made me, Lord, and made me human; so being human can't be bad. Nothing to be ashamed of. And if you made me different from everybody else, it has to be because you want me different, and there must be, in me, something you want the world to see: something that only I can give, some colour to enrich life's palette.

Lord, teach me to live today. Help me to see that love and holiness have dirty feet through dancing joyfully about the earth, hands joined in yours. That life with you is whole, and holy - Heaven is living in love with you - and that everything I do can bear your imprint, can be coloured in love.

Teach me that fear is for the Pharisees, not for the free.

And I am free in you to paint my picture as I will. Knowing that however individually my brush may paint, as long as it be true, you will be satisfied. Amen

(meditation and prayer taken from Eddie Askew's "Breaking the Rules".)

Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13: 44 - 50

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like this. A man happens to find a treasure hidden in a field. He covers it up again, and is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl

"Also, the Kingdom of Heaven is like this. A man is looking for fine pearls, and when he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys that pearl.

The Parable of the Net

"Also, the Kingdom of Heaven is like this. Some fishermen throw their net out in the lake and catch all kinds of fish. When the net is full, they pull it to shore and sit down to divide the fish : the good ones go into their buckets, the worthless ones are thrown away. It will be like this at the end of the age : the angels will go out and gather up the evil people from among the good and will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth."

Meditation:

Matthew 13:44-50 *(Taken from 'Breaking the Rules' by Eddie Askew.)*

THE community of Taizé, in France, draws people from all over the world, to worship together in an environment wider than their own different traditions. Its music has enriched Christians from many countries. It has been, and is, a place where many people have begun to find themselves, and also begun to find God. Or should that be the other way round? Really, I believe the two go together.

Brother Roger, the founder and leader of the community, began it during the Second World War as a centre for reconciliation. Recently, discussing the many thousands of visitors each year, he was asked, "What do you wish, above all, that they take back with them?"

He answered, "That they continue searching throughout their lives."

It's a wise comment. Sometimes, when we believe we've "found" God, we think the search for Heaven is over. We think we've grasped the truth, and have all we need to know. We've arrived. Indeed we have — but we've arrived at the starting point of our journey, not at the destination.

The story of the pearl tells us that the kingdom is more valuable than anything we possess. But it's a mistake to think that, once we're part of the kingdom, we can sit back and admire it. We don't possess it, it possesses us.

The time when we begin to grasp the reality of God-with-us, in Jesus, is a beginning, not an ending. It's the beginning of an exploration that takes us ever further into God, ever deeper into ourselves.

The truth, which is God, and our relationship with him, is too rich to measure, too big to encompass, too profound to fathom. Indeed, when the search is over, it's only just begun.

A question

to help us in our personal reflection:

As we go for God's kingdom, all of us have given something. Just how far do we really go? Is it enough?

Prayer:

Lord, it can be so uncomfortable, living with you. I'd like to hold you tight, - my treasure, locked up, or buried in a field. I'd feel secure, and certain, with you to call on, when I needed you.

Rub the lamp and you'd appear, on time, on tap. Predictable.

But Lord, there's nothing but frustration when I try to live like that.

I base my thoughts on self-created certainties. Draw my own blueprint and try to build you in. But you don't fit, and bits stick out.

The pattern isn't neat and tidy.

Each time I grasp an odd end of your truth and try to tuck it in, something falls out the other side.

I catch a glimpse of you.

A wild, fast moving shimmer of light - and, with trembling fingers, I try to cage it. But, lightning-quick, you slip away, smiling. Beckoning me into chase.

Leading me to new horizons, - unimagined, strange and beautiful.

It's frightening at times, unsettling.

Lord, you're not an easy-going God. I'd like to meet you by the fire on a wet evening.

Armchaired and slippers, glass in hand. But that's not how you work.

Come the wet evening, and you'll be dancing in the street. Singing in the rain. Inviting me out. - Telling me there's more to life than comfort. That simple certainties are at best a leaky umbrella.

There's more to you than I can ever fully know. I'd rather sit and watch it on TV, the story line complete and edited.

But I'm called out to make the programme. The reassurance is that while my search goes on, you're sharing it with me.

Our Father who art in Heaven.

Matthew 6: verses 8 - 9

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in Heaven, May your holy name be honoured.”

Meditation:

The other day I was on a bus , and across the aisle was a young couple with a child, maybe a year or so old. Dad had him on his knee and they were looking out of the window at the passing world together. As they looked, Dad was absently-minded stroking the head of his son, who, every now and again would lean into his dad, completely folded within his arms.

It set me thinking about words. Every time we say “Our Father” in prayer, it defines our relationship with God – but what is the relationship?

My Mum and her brothers called her father “Pater”, and I always thought how distant that sounded. His work had always taken him abroad for long periods of time and when he came home he was very much the Victorian man – correct, not demonstrative - and – well, distant.

Of course, although Dads get called all sorts of affectionate names, including ‘Father’, these days the English translation – ‘Father’ – can often have a similar distant feel. A father may pay maintenance to the mother. He may have access once a week, or once a month. – Our Father?

I don’t suppose the little lad across the aisle would call his dad “Father”. He would be saying “Daddy” – at least for the next few years and it would then probably get shortened to “Dad”. “Daddy” means the same as “Father” – but what a difference! What a wealth of love and trust is in that word! – even “Dad” is different.

The word Jesus used was “Abba” – his word for “Dad”. For scholars “Father” is a correct translation – you can’t argue with them! It’s not what Jesus meant though, and we need “Dad” as we sit on God’s knee, looking out at the world, and every now and again folding ourselves into his arms!

A question

to help us in our personal reflection:

- How do I think of God the Father? – ‘Daddy’, ‘Dad’ – or ‘Father’?
- What difference does it make to the way I pray?

Prayer:

God my Father: Dad! Fold me in your arms and hold me tight. Let me feel your love as I look out at the world. When I fall over, pick me up and dust me off so that I can stagger off to try again. Dad, hold my hand and dry my tears, get me to smile through them at you again. Laugh with me, Dad, when I get something small right – and I will grow to love you, Dad, more and more. Amen

God my Father: Dad! Your name is holy. May your will be done and your Kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven. Dad, give us what we need today and forgive us our faults as we forgive others. Keep us from being tempted away from you, Dad, and keep us safe from evil.

Father in heaven, the hand of your loving kindness powerfully yet gently guides all the moments of our day.

Go before us in our pilgrimage of life, anticipate our needs and prevent our failing. Send your Spirit to unite us in faith, that sharing in your service we may rejoice in your presence. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. *(From St Benedict's prayer Book)*

Lord, Here I am again, Like a child who needs comfort and reassurance. Lord, I keep coming to you with regrets. I keep asking you to do things for me. As a parent I know that I cannot always do everything for my children, I know that they have to stand on their own two feet.

Perhaps the best thing that I can offer my children is the love that assures them that no matter what happens they can always come home. Right now I need the assurance of that kind of love, that you will be standing by me when things go right and when things go wrong.

I often wonder if my children believe me. I wonder if they ever feel that some problem simply cannot be shared with me, I wonder if they really trust me. Trusting is difficult, yet without trust there can be no peace of mind.

Lord in the days that lie before me help me to trust in your loving presence; in the knowledge that at the end of every day I can come to you as a child to a father.

Heavenly Father, Hear my prayer. *(Taken from 'Lord of the Evening', by Frank Topping)*

Hallowed be thy name,

Matthew 6: verses 9 - 10

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in Heaven, May your holy name be honoured; may your kingdom come; may your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Meditation:

"Hallowed be thy name":

OMG how bad is that! - a headline on a sports page.

I wonder if Moses said the same thing when he came down the mountain with his 10 Commandments only to find his Israelites dancing around and worshipping a golden calf that they had made.

Respect! - "what you respect, you look up to; what you look up to, you follow; and what you follow you become. (Confucius probably didn't say that - but I've heard it somewhere!)

In other words: keep God's name holy, make it recognised as holy and we grow to God.

"thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven":

Sometimes we meet inspirational people. Some years ago, Anthony, from this parish, was working in Ghana with VSO. This is what he wrote:

'Rather like my nationality, being Catholic is not something I have consciously chosen but, nonetheless, is something that I identify with. (He then talks about Pope Benedict's visit to Cameroon and how the church, like VSO, espouses high ideals - which, when its members sometimes fail to live up to them, draws bitter criticism.)

Last weekend, I and several other volunteers went to visit the Sisters of Mercy baby rescue centre in Sirigu - about 30km away. This is run by three Ghanaian Catholic nuns with support from the local priest.

It is a fact in this area of northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso that if a mother dies in childbirth, some of the villagers in the area believe that the child is cursed and must be killed. It is impossible to estimate how many babies have been killed in this way.

For the lucky few, they are brought by family members - either the grandmother who has just lost her own child or an older sibling who has just lost their mother - to the Sisters and are given refuge for up to three years by which time the baby is judged safe and is accepted back into the community. There are currently eighteen babies in this home - the youngest being just 17 days old. The Sisters accept these babies from all tribes and from all religions. There is no indoctrination and no strings attached. They just feed them, shelter them, protect them, pray for them and love them in the way that

their late mother cannot. The elderly nun we met had just returned from taking a recently arrived 28 day old baby to the local hospital the previous day. She had waited there all night before walking back to meet us.

The older siblings that stay and help care for the babies are often only 5 or 6 years old themselves. One of the Sisters is a trained primary teacher so has dedicated a room to be the classroom for these young carers. Our job was to paint the room with the alphabet and numbers and flags and shapes and all the usual things you might find in a primary classroom.

These nuns, and countless others across the continent and around the world, have sacrificed everything to dedicate their lives to the service of others. They do so without any payment or, often, recognition. I'm sure the nuns make mistakes and I'm sure they are, like all of us, fallible, but they are actively trying to live the high ideals of the Catholic Church in a way that is, frankly, humbling. They are rarely given newspaper column inches in the way that a juicy sex scandal might - but they are, I believe, the true heart of the Catholic faith and I, as a Catholic and as a human being, am mightily proud of them.'

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." We need to really pray those words! These people are working for and in the Earthly bit of God's kingdom. For those children they are angels, bringing a bit of Heaven with them!

A question

to help us in our personal reflection:

When and how am I an angel, bringing God's kingdom to this world?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, - Dad - here I am. Everything I have, you have given me and is yours. Tell me what you would like me to do and give me the courage, inspiration and enthusiasm to go out and do it. With your help, may I remember to give to others the support and encouragement they need, so that together we may build your kingdom.
Amen

God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendour of creation, in the beauty of human life.

Touched by your hand our world is holy. Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us, to share your blessings with our brothers and sisters, and to experience the joy of life in your presence. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen. *(from St Benedict's Prayer Book)*

Thy Kingdom Come,

The Lord's Supper *(Matthew 26: 26 – 30)*

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. "Take and eat it," he said; "this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. "Drink it, all of you," he said; "this is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in my Father's Kingdom."

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Meditation

What happens when someone gives themselves to you in love – completely, wholly, body and soul? They love you so much.

A tingling feeling? A lump inside? A panic attack?

What does Jesus do in Communion? He gives himself to us, completely, wholly, body and soul, in love. We are joined to him, absorbed in him, alive in him – and with the whole of his family here on earth and in Heaven.

People, big and small, rich and poor, angels, sinners and saints – everybody – joined in one word, one Communion, one community, one sacrifice, one celebration, one rising, across time and space.

As he gave himself to us, he also gave us the example to follow: he got down and washed the disciples' feet before getting up and going out to his death and resurrection for us.

What can we do? The nuns in Sirigu do what they can - and across the world and across time, people follow Christ's example: feeding the poor, comforting the lonely and lost, being with the sick, tolerating teenagers, caring in a myriad of ways for others: Saints for Christ's sake. Because of them, the world is a better place.

"Thy Kingdom come...on Earth, as it is in Heaven:" a glimpse of Heaven, here and now.

Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

How do I receive Communion?

What is my response to Christ's unconditional love?

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from thee.
From the malicious enemy defend me.
In the hour of my death call me,
And bid me come unto Thee.
That with Thy saints I may praise Thee.
For ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Lord Jesus, I give you my hands to do your work, I give you my feet to go your way. I give you my tongue to speak your words. I give you my mind that you may think in me. I give you my spirit that you may pray in me. Above all I give you my heart that you may love in me your Father, and all mankind. I give you my whole self that you may grow in me, so that it is you, Lord Jesus, who live and work and pray in me.

Transfigured:

Mark 10 verse 32

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him.

Matthew 17 Verses 1 - 9

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Eli'jah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah." He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead."

Some thoughts and a meditation:

These two passages speak to us about how intimate Jesus was to God. We know, not only by what he says, but also by his effect on those around him – they feel ‘amazed and afraid’ – ‘Awe and wonder’! -

Imagine it:

“We follow Jesus when he’s in our district and when we can. We’ve got to know each other and now we’re walking behind him up this steep hill – chatting in a puffed sort of way. He is so inspiring – my family and I have totally changed our ways since we got to know him and now we know he will stop soon and talk to us. In the meantime, as we go along we swap news about our families, what’s happening in Jerusalem, and how one day we’ll get rid of the Romans – some even say perhaps Jesus.....

What is it? A hush comes over us. We all feel it – something about Jesus as he leads us! Nothing seems changed, yet we feel totally in awe of him! Would we dare approach him? Can we go on? Everything seems bright, sharp and immediate. I want to fall down and hide my face! Then it passes and Jesus is just Jesus. He stops and sits on a rock, talking to his friends. We all crowd round to listen.”

In many ways the story of the transfiguration is very similar to this one – a little more detailed, perhaps. It is in all the Gospels, except John's. It must be important - but why? - and why did Jesus tell Peter, James and John not to say anything until after the resurrection?

St Leo the Great gives us an explanation that helps to solve the puzzle. After the shock, the trauma and the shame of the crucifixion, the disciples would need something dramatic to hang on to and to give them faith in the resurrection. They needed not just to know, but to see and feel that Jesus was the Christ and that he was who he said he was. Although Peter had declared at Capernaum that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, and Jesus had told the Samaritan woman at the well that he was indeed the Messiah, they needed a glimpse of the Heavenly Christ to carry them through.

Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection:

When do I feel awe and wonder at God's presence?

If I was with the disciples at the transfiguration, what would my reaction be? – and why?

How do I feel as I go to receive Communion?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, some years ago on holiday, we took a coach trip into the mountains. We walked up a narrow path and came out onto a ledge above a thousand-foot sheer drop to the valley below. It was amazing, although I, for one, was quite fearful, it was also wonderful! We stayed a long time! Amazed and afraid, Lord, awed and filled with wonder!

Sometimes, when I'm in Mass and receive you in Communion, I think I should feel the same, but you are so well hidden, Lord, that I don't – not normally.

Your transfiguration brings it home to me just how amazed I should be. I should be filled with awe and wonder at who you are and what you have done for us – for me. Help me, Lord, to feel how special you are and how special you make me just by being with me. By following behind you, let me feel your presence and your love. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen.

John 14: 1 – 12. I am the way

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many places to live in; otherwise I would have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you to myself, so that you may be with me where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? What I say to you I do not speak of my own accord: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his works. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe it on the evidence of these works. In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection:

- a) What do these verses reveal about the relationship of Jesus with the Father?
- b) What do these verses tell us about our relationship with the Father?
- c) Jesus said, "In my Father's house there are many places to live in". What do these words mean for us today?
- d) Which problems and desires are implied in the questions of Thomas and Philip?

Meditation:

Chapter 14 teaches us how to live without the physical presence of Jesus.

John 14:1-4: Jesus says, "There are many rooms in my Father's house!" It is not necessary for all to be alike. What matters is that all accept Jesus as the revelation of the Father and that, for love of him, all take on an attitude of service and love. Love and service are the mortar, which binds together the many bricks of the wall and makes the diverse communities into one Church of brothers and sisters.

John 14:5-7: Thomas asks: "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus replies, "I am the way, the life and the truth!" Three important words. Without the way we cannot walk. Without the truth we cannot be certain. Without life, there is only death! Jesus explains that he is the **way** because "No one can come to the Father except through me!" He is the door through which the sheep enter and leave (Jn 10:9). Jesus is the **truth** because seeing him we see the image of the

Father. "If you know me, you know my Father too!" Jesus is the *life* because if we walk in his footsteps we shall be united to the Father and shall have life in us.

John 14:8-11: Philip asks, "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'" Philip expressed the desire of all of us: what must I do to see the Father of whom Jesus speaks so much? Jesus' answer is very beautiful, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We must not think that God is far away, distant and unknown. Anyone who desires to know how and who God the Father is, has only to look at Jesus. He has revealed the Father in the words and signs of his life! "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Through his manner of being, Jesus revealed a new face of God that drew people to him. Through his obedience, he was completely identified with the Father. At all times he did that which the Father wanted him to do (Jn 5:30; 8:28-29.38). That is why everything in Jesus is the revelation of the Father! The signs and works he did are the work of the Father! In the same way, we, by our manner of living and living together, must be a revelation of Jesus. To have seen us should be to have seen and recognised in us a part of Jesus.

John 14: 12: Jesus' promise. Jesus says that an intimate relationship with the Father is not his privilege alone, but is possible for all of us who believe in him. (Jn 14:13)

Some thoughts:

What we need to meditate here is "How do I reflect Jesus?" Am I like Peter who would not accept a servant and suffering Jesus and wanted a Jesus according to his wishes? (Mk 8:32-33). Am I like those who can only say "Lord! Lord!" (Mt 7:21). Am I like those who only wish for a celestial and glorious Christ and forget that Jesus of Nazareth walked with the poor, welcomed the marginalized, healed the sick and reinstated those excluded. Do I look at how Christ himself lived his life and try to follow his example?

(Adapted from the Carmelite website : <http://ocarm.org/.../lectio-divina-5th-sunday-easter>)

Prayer:

The idea of Heaven scares me a bit, Lord! It's like a big party with millions and billions of others. I know you'll be there – but it's still very scary!

And then you say "In my Father's house there are many places to live in" It's not just reassuring, it's exciting, too! As always, you know what we need! As always, you look after us! As always you enfold us in your all-encompassing love!

Philip and Thomas have asked our questions for us, so we ask that one day we may be with you – and those you choose – in paradise.

In the meantime, I have a job to do! Help me to follow your way and to do your will so that day by day I may grow closer to you and the Father. Amen

Final thoughts:

Revelation 21 [New International Version (NIV)]

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No programme accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development, We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are the workers, not the master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are the prophets of a future not our own. Amen.

(Attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero)

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