



A Gift of Light

Lenten Study

Day 1

Read: John 8:12

Introduction

The *Bible Reader's Encyclopedia & Concordance* provides the perfect introduction to this Lenten series: "The ancients held light to be holy. Hence the Bible associates it with God. He not only lives in light (Exodus 24:10) and is clothed with it (Psalm 104:2), but He is light (1 John 1:5). Hence when God becomes incarnate, He is called 'the Light of the world' (John 1:1-18). To walk in the light brings salvation (1 John 1:7), while a life without God is darkness (John 3:19)."

This series was inspired by a book entitled *A Gift of Light*, a collection of thoughts from Henry Ernest Hardy, an Anglican monk known to the world as Father Andrew. Born in 1869, he has been called the greatest teacher of Christian love since the apostle John. In his 77 years of life Father Andrew wrote nineteen books of prose, nine collections of poetry, and six plays. For each day of this series, the passage of Scripture and commentary on it have been designed to tie into one of Father Andrew's famous quotes.

God is love. Jesus came as the light of the world to show us that love in human form. As we consider our lives this Lent, let's allow Scripture and Father Andrew's thoughts to teach us to love as Christ did.

R&D *What first comes to your mind when you think of love?*

Prayer: *Show us, Lord Christ, how to love as you love.*

Day 2

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

Darkness

In today's reading, the apostle John has given us as clear a teaching on love as there is in Scripture; in its way even more so than Paul's treatise on love in 1 Corinthians 13. John connects love with its source: God. Then he shows how God's love is to penetrate us through the Holy Spirit within us. Such love gives us confidence in the day of judgment because with God living in us through Christ, we have no reason to fear that day. On the other hand we are given a test of our love. If we do not love our brother whom we can see, how can we say we love God Whom we cannot see?

Against this backdrop of the light of God's love, we also note the darkness of our self-centeredness...which may not be the result of lack of love of our brother, but over-love our ourselves. If we are honest with ourselves, selfishness is always present in our thoughts and actions. Let me illustrate. As Lent begins, I am returning to a discipline that has been meaningful to me for years. Each day I send a note to someone who has been special in my life. As I contemplated this today, my first thought was: not much has happened in my life over the last year that would

be of interest to the people I am writing. Then, like a flash of lightning, it was as though the Holy Spirit spoke to my thought process: “You are not writing to tell them about yourself but to thank them for who they are!” Once again, my concern about myself overshadowed what should have been loving thoughts. Which leads to this quote about love from Father Andrew:

“As long as we are going to get anything out of what we are doing, there comes in a certain measure of self-seeking. But when in complete darkness we choose love, when in the midst of happiness we choose what is right at the cost of happiness, we are somewhere near the Lord Who for the love us endured utter darkness.”

R&D In what ways does selfishness interfere with your showing love to others? What can you do about that?

Prayer: Help me, Lord God, to take the focus off of myself that I may see how more effectively to show love to others.

Day 3

Read: Romans 5:1-8

Crucible

Today’s reading is about being tested. For the first-century Christians to whom Paul was writing, suffering was the rule rather than the exception. We can be grateful that we don’t live in a time such as that, but we also know that we will always face difficulties that are there to help us grow. We may not exactly rejoice in our sufferings, but we can know that God is using these difficulties and attacks by the evil one to build our character: “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (vv.3, 4).

By the grace of God, I live a comfortable life. That is not to say there are no challenges that (hopefully) help me grow in the manner Paul suggests. But as an online missionary for Global Media Outreach, I am dealing every day with people who are facing serious suffering all over the world. My ministry is to help them see that God loves them and is with them in the midst of their trials, and to help them grow in their relationship with Christ.

My messages to these people are a poor substitute for the assurances of Scripture such as our reading today; but, relying on the Bible, I try to reveal the truth to them that, as sinners by nature, we can do nothing to save ourselves. We must rely on the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:20) that His eternal “Yes” is in Jesus Christ who died for us. Or, as Father Andrew put it: “Gold is tested by being put in a crucible and letting the fire prove it to be gold. God willed that we should test Him on Calvary, and the fire of hate and sin wrapped round the Body of God as He hung there on the Cross, but nothing came forth from Him but love.”

R&D In what ways is God testing you today?

Prayer: Lord, help me first, in all difficulties, to look to You.

Day 4

Read: Matthew 20:20-28

Perspective

My wife and I live in a life care community. Each night we have dinner with neighbors who have become like family to us. Last night we had nine people at our table, but several place

settings lacked napkins and utensils as we sat down. Immediately a person among us who has a servant's heart took care of the situation by finding and supplying the needed items. This person is also a leader in our community, and one who knows what Christian leadership is all about.

That's what the circumstances in today's reading led Jesus to discuss. Jesus described leadership from a new perspective. Many people use others to achieve their goals. Instead of using them, we are to serve them. Jesus' mission was to serve others and give his life away. He is telling his disciples that they are to have a servant's heart. As Christ's people in the world today, we are to follow his image and his teachings. We are here on earth for the benefit of others.

The mother of James and John, and the two men themselves, wanted a favor from Jesus. They wanted a top spot in the kingdom of God. The other disciples were furious about this...they perhaps wanted those leadership places for themselves. Their priorities were all wrong, and they had no idea what lay ahead for Jesus and for them. Jesus needed to put the situation into the true perspective. Father Andrew put it this way: "Humility arises from one's knowledge of the truth about oneself, and charity from one's knowledge of the truth about God."

R&D How do you react to the statement that we Christians are here on earth for the benefit of others?

Prayer: Help me, Lord Jesus, to follow your lead, and lead as you did.

Day 5

Read: Hebrews 11:1-13

Faith

Hebrews 11 is about the great heroes of the faith. It is about those who believed God and followed Him even though they could not know where He was leading them. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (v.1). Faith is built upon loving God and trusting Him for our future even when we cannot see where that future is going.

The *Life Application Bible* says, "Two words describe faith: *sure* and *certain*. These two qualities need a secure beginning and ending point. The beginning point is believing in God's character—he is who he says. The end point is believing in God's promises—he will do what he says. When we believe that God will fulfill his promises even though we don't see those promises materializing yet, we demonstrate true faith (see John 20:24-31)." Just believing that God exists is only the beginning of faith. Even demons recognized that (James 2:19, 20). God wants much more than mere acknowledgment of His existence. He wants our faith to lead to a strong, personal relationship with Him.

Father Andrew put it this way: "In this life we have a unique opportunity of serving God and our neighbor in a particular way, and that will never come to us again. It is well for us to remember that we have our opportunity here and now to witness to God in this world and to do our part as well as we can while there is time. This life is the opportunity of faith. When we can see God, we shall be able to give Him our worship and our love, but we shall no longer be able to give Him our faith. That belongs to our period here."

R&D Reflect on the lives of people who have been, for you, heroes of the faith. What have you learned from them about faith?

Prayer: Lord, I believe; help me in my unbelief.

Day 6

Read: Mark 1:14-20

Belief

Our lesson for today is the start of Jesus' ministry. He announces that the kingdom of God is near and calls for repentance and belief in the good news that comes in him. Moving quickly along, as Mark customarily does, we have the calling of the first four disciples. The fact that they immediately "left their nets" to follow him, might indicate that they believed in Jesus from the start. In fact, they had to grow in their faith just as the rest of us do (14:48-50, 66-72; John 14:1-9; 20:26-29). This apparently wasn't the only time Jesus called Peter, James, and John to follow him (see Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-42, for example). The point is that, although the call drew quick response, their following was not assurance of belief; they, like us, had to keep on following.

Each person's pathway to belief has its own trail to follow. Some people become conscious of Christ early in life, often through the faith of their parents. In the years that follow, they may experience their childish beliefs maturing into full-blown faith as they experience God's love protecting and guiding them. On the other hand are the "early believers" who fall away from the faith in their later years as either they are enticed by worldly ways or become doubters because of disappointment with God. Still others, such as myself, remain agnostic until later in life (mid-20s for me) before coming into a full-fledged belief in Christ as Savior and Lord. And, undoubtedly, there are many other variations.

The fact is that there is a process we have to work through to come into a mature faith. Life tests us in a multitude of ways, and we need to see what difference faith in Christ makes as we face them. Father Andrew put it this way: "It is only when we can say from the depths of our own conviction and in the power of our own experience, 'Lord, I believe,' that we make our first step into the light of the everlasting dawn."

R&D How did you come into the kind of belief Father Andrew speaks of?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for having patience with us as we attempt to grow in our relationship with you.

Day 7

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3

Perseverance

In a passage that has to do with a race, it is good to think of a "great cloud of witnesses" who are cheering us on. But we can also look at them as powerful witnesses of faith who faced immense challenges and persevered. They are ones who have run the race of faith and have won. This assures us that we are not alone. There are those who have endured much greater circumstances than will ever face us and have kept going.

We know that the Christian life involves hard work. Life is truly like a race in which we are to have our eyes fixed on Jesus rather than on a particular finish line. We are to put aside anything that hinders our relationship with God, running with endurance and struggling against sin through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Sometimes a part of the struggle is when we feel separated from God when we need Him most. Although God loves us and is always with us, there are occasions when it doesn't feel like that is so. Psalm 6:1-7 is a plea from King David

when he was experiencing this distress. “My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?” he cries. This, too, can be a stumbling block when we are running the race of life in Christ.

Father Andrew’s message to us is the same as our Scripture. The race is difficult, but the reward is well worth it. He said, “Great faith is not the faith that walks always in the light and knows no darkness, but the faith that perseveres in spite of God’s seeming silences, and that faith will most certainly and surely get its true reward.”

R&D *What are your greatest difficulties in trying to run to race of faith?*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to keep my eyes on you, regardless of the circumstances.*

Day 8

Read: Romans 12:1-2

Cost

Today’s reading continues the theme of persevering faith. In Old Testament times animals were sacrificed on the altar of God; but, even then, God preferred obedience of the heart as the greater sacrifice (see 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6; Amos 5:21-24). Therefore, Paul calls us to offer our bodies as *living* sacrifices. That means daily laying aside our own desires in order to follow Him. It means putting our energy and resources at God’s disposal and looking to Him for the results.

Furthermore, God wants us transformed into the image of Christ, renewing our minds and living to honor and obey Him. In this manner we will grow increasingly able to discern God’s will and follow it. There is a process of prayer, Bible study, worship, and service that is our desired pattern of behavior rather than the pattern that the world has in mind for us. This spiritually maturing process is a lifelong effort. It is only when the Holy Spirit is free to renew, reeducate and redirect our minds that we are truly transformed (see 8:5).

This is the desired road ahead for each of us. It is not an easy job to think of laying ourselves on the altar of God as living sacrifices and then being transformed in the manner He has every right to expect. What encourages us onward? The realization of what God has done for us. Father Andrew said, “If we really believe that the Man Who was nailed to the Cross of Calvary is our God, and hung there for the love of us, we cannot expect that our following of Him should not be a very costing thing.”

R&D *Reflect on the symbolism of laying your life on the altar of God.*

Prayer: *Expand my horizons, Lord, that I may comprehend all You have in mind for me.*

Day 9

Read: Matthew 7:15-20

Disciples

Our lesson today comes in the form of a warning against false prophets, but I want us to look at it from a standpoint of what it tells all of us about who we really are. Jesus says, basically, by your fruit you will be known.

In this regard, as I reflect on people I have known, two immediately come to my mind. One was clever, resourceful, friendly, and extremely competent. He attracted people like a magnet. He had many followers, and I was one of them. In time, however, the veneer of his personal-

ity began to wear away. Those who followed began to see that they were being used for his purposes rather than for their own benefit.

The other person was a drug addict and former convict. He, too, had a good personality and leadership ability. However, rather than trying to lead people, his focus was on serving others. He became the janitor at our church and wasn't content with just keeping things clean and in order. He always "went the extra mile" to make everything better.

Jesus said that we would be known by our fruit. And the apostle Paul taught about the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) we are to develop as we mature in the Christian faith. These fruit reveal the pattern of our behavior, and Father Andrew said, "It is our behavior in life, not so much what we do as how we do it, not so much what we suffer as how we take it, that marks us as the disciples of the Divine Master."

R&D Measure yourself against the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Prayer: Lord, help me grow good fruit on my tree of life.

Day 10

Read: Ephesians 4:1-16

Character

In today's lesson Paul gives us our marching orders. God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives here on earth. Therefore, we are to live lives worthy of this calling. That means living the life of Christ and carrying out his work in the world. It includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. But there is also to be unity among us. We are to be a body of people who work together for one purpose: bringing the world to Christ.

How do we do this? One way is by exercising the spiritual gifts God has given us, ministering to one another and to those around us. Paul then names some of those gifts (v.11) while listing others in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. We can't do what Christ would have us do in our own strength and by our own talents. Just as we need the Holy Spirit guiding us in actions and decisions, we need these gifts of the Holy Spirit to equip and empower us.

As we exercise these gifts we mature in our faith, no longer being driven back and forth by false teachings or by the temptations of life. Instead, we speak the truth in love and grow into Christ (v.15).

Paul is giving us a picture of what the Christian life should look like. There's work to be done, there are challenges ahead, but we are to be a body of people working in harmony to accomplish Christ's purposes. As Father Andrew put it: "Life is a great vocation, and Christ's disciples will put into it all they can of sacrifice, love and labor. The Christian character is the flower of which sacrifice is the seed."

R&D Are you effectively ministering in the gifts of the Spirit you have received? Explain.

Prayer: Inspire, empower, and guide me, Holy Spirit, to do the work Christ would have me do.

Day 11

Read: Romans 12:9-21

Devotion

In 1 Corinthians 13 we have Paul's treatise on love. In today's reading, we have his demonstrations of it. When I am writing commentary on Scripture for *The Journey* I often find it helpful to look at the footnotes in my *Life Application Bible*. Concerning today's passage one footnote makes the point that most of have learned how to pretend to love others. This involves speaking in a kindly manner to people and not hurting their feelings. We may even go so far as to seem moved by their needs and indignant to the injustices they face. The footnote then goes on to say that God calls us to a sincere love.

The question is how we show that sincere love. It is here that I take exception to the footnote because it mentions that sincere love requires concentration and effort. While that is to some extent true, it places too much emphasis on us instead of the Holy Spirit within us. I'm not nearly as interested in another person's concentration and effort toward me as I am in God's love flowing naturally (or maybe I should say supernaturally) from that person.

Paul gives us some wonderful examples of how Christian love is demonstrated in our lives: we honor one another above ourselves; we're joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer; we share with those in need; we rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn; and we live in harmony with one another. But, how do we do this? Not by rigid determination but by devotion to God, because—if it is to be true love—it has to be His love flowing through us to others.

Father Andrew stated it this way: "The end of devotion is attained when the complete taking of all things meets with the complete giving of all things. The supreme devotion of our Lord's life was consummated as He laid down His life for His sheep and yielded His spirit in perfect faith to His Father. The true end of devotion is the gift of ourselves and all we have to God."

R&D Reflect on loving acts on your part toward others; what is your motivation?

Prayer: Lord, help me to give all I have to You.

Day 12

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Pride

There are three primary teachings in our short reading of one of Jesus' parables. One is about repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter all began their ministries with calls to repentance. Our sin is the stumbling block to a relationship with God. The tax collector realized this. Not only is he repentant in his words, but his whole body language shows his humbled state: he stood at a distance, did not look up, and beat his breast. He gives us a graphic example of what repentance is all about.

Another teaching, of course, is about pride. C. S. Lewis said, "According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison. It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind." The Pharisee in our story is the epitome of pride. The Pharisee prayed about himself and told God how much better he was than other men such as the tax collector.

The third teaching is about prayer. We are clearly to come to it humbled and penitent, divorced from any pride. Father Andrew taught: “There is no enemy to prayer like pride, and spiritual pride is the death of spiritual prayer. God’s mercy will always humble us while He leads us, for the ascent of the soul to the highest is conditioned by the descent of the self to the lowest. Our Lord’s spiritual ascension was manifest in earthly action as He washed the feet of sinful men and died at the hands of sinners on a cross in the dark night of Calvary.”

R&D *Compare your manner of praying with the two men in the parable.*

Prayer: *God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Day 13

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Living Prayer

There are several messages in this closing of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, but I’m going to focus on what he has to say about prayer. We can’t spend all of our time before the Lord in formal prayers, but it is possible to have an attitude of prayer throughout the day. This acknowledges our dependence on God and reveals itself in laying issues before Him that we face as the day goes along. A prayerful attitude should not preclude our also having regular, more formal, times of prayer but should be a natural outgrowth of this living prayer.

Furthermore, our joy, prayers, and thankfulness (vv.16-18) should not fluctuate greatly as our circumstances change. It’s not easy to remain in those attitudes when things are falling apart around us. There are times when we feel overwhelmed by life, and there are others when we feel spirituality dead. But Paul is telling us to “hang in there” despite the issues we face. He would have us remember that it is God’s will for us to be continuing to look to the Holy Spirit within us for comfort and guidance through all circumstances, and to lean into the peace of God which can saturate us through and through if we are living in prayer.

Father Andrew expressed it this way: “The habit of living in prayer is no easy matter, and our prayer experience has, and must have, its cycles and seasons. Winters of patient waiting and apparent deadness are succeeded by springs of hope and quiet mellow summers and autumn glories, to be followed by more winters and new springs, as the soul passes through its seasons of spiritual experience as a branch of the living Vine. The voice of God called us out of nothing into being, and that same voice calls us on to a deliberate life of worship; and the utterance of our own life is to find union with the utterance of this living voice which is ever leading us on to a more understanding obedience and a purer condition of contrite love.”

R&D *How does the idea of “pray continually” fit into your life experience? Explain.*

Prayer: *Lord, Your ever-presence is the source of my joy, the foundation of my prayer, and the cause of my thanksgiving.*

Day 14

Read: Matthew 6:9-13

Distractions

God expects us to pray for ourselves. When my wife and I taught prayer workshops we often ran into people who acted as though praying for themselves was somehow selfish. In fact,

God wants us to be dependent on Him, and we show that by coming to Him with our personal needs. Incidentally, we are unlikely to get distracted in our prayers when we are praying for ourselves.

Distractions are more likely to happen when we are saying prayers we have memorized and repeated so many times that they become automatic, as often happens to me when I say the Lord's Prayer. Did it happen to you just now? It can also happen, for instance, when we are praying for a list of people we customarily include in our intercessions.

There is the other point that God is just as interested in our distractions as He is in our focused prayers because they reveal what is really on our minds.

Father Andrew's idea is this: "Often I have heard people say that they could pray to God while they were walking about and doing their chores, but as soon as they knelt down they were plagued with distracting thoughts. The truth about that is that they prayed best when they were least conscious of themselves."

R&D How do you deal with distracting thoughts when you are trying to pray?

Prayer: Thank You, Father God, that prayer is communication with You regardless of our wandering minds. Thank You for Your forgiveness when we also have wandering wills.

Day 15

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

Intercessory Prayer

My intercessory prayers are mostly that those I pray for will be healed in various ways. Paul's focus is much broader than mine. He is thanking God for the Ephesians and praying that they will get to know God better. He wants them to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Then, he uses this wonderful phrasing that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he (God) has power for us who believe."

Think for a moment how our own intercessory prayers would be enriched if we approached them with the kind of wording Paul pours into his prayer rather than simply listing before God all those we feel called to pray for. Paul feels a personal responsibility toward these people as a spiritual father would toward his spiritual children. Do we have similar feelings of responsibility toward those for whom we pray?

Furthermore, in intercessory prayer, those feelings of responsibility should extend beyond words to—when appropriate—action. We should be ready to "put feet on our prayers" when needed. Father Andrew looked at it this way: "Intercessory prayer, prayer 'in the Name of Jesus,' is this. It is not suggesting to God ways of helping: it is not reminding God of things. It is our faith that God is helping: it is our remembrance that God is remembering. It is putting ourselves at the disposal of God that He may use our will power and heart power as waves of spiritual love and energy given to Him and made free for Him to use in blessing those whom we are allowed to cooperate with Him in helping, and whom He can only help humanly if we put our humanity at His disposal."

R&D How might you reshape your intercessory prayers to adopt Paul's approach?

Prayer: Lord, help me to do my share of caring for those for whom I pray.

Day 16

Read: Philippians 1:9-11

Our Will

Today we have another example of Paul's thoughtful and loving prayers, this time for the Philippians. Paul wants the Philippians to "abound...in knowledge and depth of insight" and to "discern what is best." In other words, he wants them to be able to tell the difference between right and wrong so they may know God's will for their lives. We need moral discernment so that we can maintain the standards that God provides us in Scripture, and those standards should be reflected in our prayers.

Paul speaks of the "fruit of righteousness" that comes from Jesus Christ. The fruit of righteousness can only come from Christ. It is in him and through him that we discern the will of God. How effective can prayer be if those who are praying are ignorant of God's call upon their lives? If we don't know the difference between right and wrong, what might we be praying and how might we be living?

Father Andrew believed that it is essential that we take our prayers as seriously as Paul did. We should bring into the prayer experience everything about who we are. Prayer is communication with this great loving God who wants to be in contact with us. It is an awesome experience and should call the best from us. Thus: "The first thing that we have to determine when we come to prayer is that we will really come to God with our wills and our minds and not just our mouths and our knees."

R&D What is most important to you about your prayer time with God? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, may I come to you with my will and my mind, and may my will be in harmony with Yours.

Day 17

Read: Matthew 26:35-46

Attention

Today's reading is, of course, one the most important in the Bible. Jesus yields his will to the Father, leading to his death on the cross. We can assume that Christ's will was always in harmony with the Father's, but it is only appropriate that he wants assurance in this situation. He was not resisting God's will in asking that the cup of suffering and separation be taken from him. He affirms this in saying, "Not as I will, but as you will" (v.39c).

Let's look, on the other hand, at the disciples. They had all declared that they would die before disowning Jesus (v.35). A short time later, however, they will have scattered. It is easy to say we are devoted to Christ; it is much harder to stand boldly with him when we face disapproval or, like the disciples, danger. Jesus used Peter's drowsiness to warn him against temptation to stray when it is God's will to keep watch and pray. The disciples end up being a sorry example of providing the support Jesus needed at that crucial time.

Yet, perhaps the disciples can be forgiven for their inattention to what Jesus was going through. What we want to avoid is letting the same thing happen to us when we have no defense for our wayward minds. Father Andrew stated it this way: "If we discover that our attention has wandered when we have been saying some prayer, do not let us repeat the prayer but just renew the attention. A wandering mind cannot always be helped. What is critical is that there should not be a wandering will."

R&D *Are you able to keep focused on God's will in your prayers? Why or why not?*

Prayer: *Help me always to focus, Dear Lord, on what You want regardless of my own natural waywardness.*

Day 18

Read: Matthew 8:23-27

Be Not Afraid

We know that at least four of the disciples were fishermen by trade, often in a boat on the Sea of Galilee; how could they be so afraid of a storm? The Sea of Galilee is an unusual body of water. It is relatively small but very deep, and the shoreline is 680 feet below sea level. Sudden storms crash down from the surrounding mountains stirring the water into 20-foot waves. The experience of the fishermen/disciples, instead of calming their nerves, probably made them even more afraid than the other disciples. In this instance, once Jesus had been awakened, he commanded the sea to be still...to the amazement of his disciples.

When Jesus came walking to them on water at another time when they were amid a stormy sea, he told them, "It is I; don't be afraid" (John 6:16-21). Also, in Matthew 28:20b, as Jesus gives us his departing words, he says, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We may not be caught in a physical storm on the high seas, but life is filled with dangerous challenges. We may be in the most unnerving of circumstances or the deepest depression; but we have Christ's promise to be with us always. We need to say to ourselves, "Be not afraid; God is here." Or, as Father Andrew expressed it: "We may be in the most sinful surroundings and have purity in ourselves, or in the most depressing surroundings and have hope in ourselves. In all places and at all times Jesus is near us, and to such as are ready to receive Him His word is ever: 'It is I; be not afraid.'"

R&D *What was the most recent fearful situation you faced, and how did you handle it?*

Prayer: *May I never forget, Lord, that despite whatever difficult odds I face, You and I are a majority.*

Day 19

Read: Luke 2:41-52

Go Back

Today we have the familiar story of Jesus, at 12 years of age, getting so involved in discussions with the rabbis that his family went off without him. The Feast of the Passover was one of three great festivals all men were to attend in Jerusalem each year. At 12, Jesus was considered to be almost an adult, so he might not normally have spent much time with his parents during the feast. And, heading home after the festival, Jesus could have been with others his own age. So, a full day had passed before Joseph and Mary realized he was not with them and had to go back for him.

The temple courts were famous places of learning throughout Judea. The apostle Paul studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of his time (Acts 22:3). At the Feast of the Passover one of the main topics of discussion would have been the expectant Messi-

ah. Jesus would have been eager to listen and to ask questions; and it was not his youth but the depth of his wisdom that would have intrigued the rabbis. Thus, the disconnect that left Jesus “about his Father’s business” (v.49b) in the temple while his parents were returning to Nazareth.

The ways in which we go off and leave Jesus are very different. But, compare, for instance, those mentioned in Jesus’ Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-22) because they are much like people of our day. Some might show interest in Jesus momentarily, but quickly leave him for other interests. A second group might receive him with joy but are not rooted in him, and any distraction quickly turns them away. Still others may begin seriously to follow Christ but they get entangled in the enticements of the world and ultimately also leave him. And even those of us who live the Christian life for long years can fall away from time to time. In fact, however, it is not Jesus who is lost; we are the ones who are lost without him. Father Andrew said, “When Mary and Joseph lost the Holy Child, they had to go back to where they had lost Him, and we have to do that over and over again in life.”

R&D Can you recall a time in your own life when you were more or less separated from Jesus and had to come back to him? Explain.

Prayer: Lord Christ, I place before you those people I know who have either never accepted you or have fallen away from you. Please reach them before it is too late.

Day 20

Read: Mark 1:35-37; Luke 6:12-16

Spiritual Exercise

We have today two instances of Jesus going out alone to pray. In the first his prayer time is interrupted by the disciples who want him to swing into action because “everyone is looking for you.” In the second Jesus concludes his prayer time by picking the twelve men he designated as apostles. The first reading shows us how important time alone with the Father in prayer was to Jesus. The second shows us the results of such prayers; the choosing of the twelve was, of course, a major step in Jesus’ ministry.

We live today in a hectic world filled with a multitude of distractions. As a result, perhaps we need more “quiet time” in prayer than was needed in Jesus’ day. It is even so easy to be caught up in ministry that we neglect the time for seeking the Lord’s guidance that is essential to ministry. In my life, I have found it necessary to begin the day with the Lord. It is in this way that I can calmly reflect on the day ahead. Sometimes I receive guidance and at other times I am simply able to relax into the confidence that I will get the guidance I need when I need it.

Some suggestions for quiet time with the Lord: (a) seek the Lord before your busy schedule places its unreasonable demands upon you; (b) get away from the noise of life to focus on God; (c) make it a habit to spend time in the solitude of prayer so that you can look forward to it; (d) reflect on the priorities Jesus had for his life and think about what that says about what your priorities should be; and (e) thank God that He provides this precious time to be in communication with Him.

If Jesus found it essential to have quiet time with the Father in prayer, certainly we should as well. Before letting anything else take control of our lives, why not set aside special times to be alone with God in prayer? As Father Andrew said, “The real burning the candle at both ends is exercising body and mind without exercising the soul. Times of spiritual refreshment, however we come by them, are much more important than times of physical rest.”

R&D *What is your practice, and what is your experience, of having time of spiritual refreshment with the Lord?*

Prayer: *Lord, it is an awesome thought that You care enough about me to meet me in prayer. Thank You.*

Day 21

Read: Matthew 26:20-30

Sharing

Our reading today says nothing about the sorrow that undoubtedly lay in Jesus' heart as he had this special time with the Twelve. Yet, you cannot read the passage without feeling that deep, underlying sorrow as Jesus looked toward his suffering and death. And, the disciples were certainly saddened by the fact that one of them would betray Jesus, a fact that must truly have broken Jesus' heart.

Jesus' love for the Twelve and for all of us who would come after them was shown in what we call The Last Supper. He gave them and us something to remember him by. But, more than that, he gave us himself—his body and blood—that can sustain us in the deepest of troubles and empower us for the work God has given us to do.

As we seek to be Christ to the world around us, anything we do pales in comparison to what he did in our Scripture passage. Yet, we too can show our love to those closest to us by sharing our lives with them, including our sorrows. Father Andrew put it this way: "The highest privilege there is the privilege of being allowed to share another's pain. You talk about your pleasures with your acquaintances; you talk about your troubles with your friends. It is only with the person you know and trust most that you can share your greatest sorrows."

R&D *With whom do you share the deepest issues you face in life?*

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for being my best friend, but for also providing loved ones with whom I can share my joys and my sorrows.*

Day 22

Read: John 5:1-9a

Time

Let's take a story—today's reading—that is not a parable and turn it into one.

There once was a man 38 years of age who had spent a great portion of this life near a pool of water. Many people passed by there each day and others who liked to refresh themselves in the pool became good friends of our man over a period of time.

There were, over the years, many conversations. Pool-sitters can become avid philosophers, studying people and life in general. They had ideas about what was going on in the world and how people should live in order to get the most out of it. Many told our man of the exciting adventures they had had. Others shared their challenges. Still others talked about their pain, their disappointments in life and their constant struggles. Our man absorbed all of this information but it failed to bring joy and fulfillment to his life. Then one day Jesus came along and said, "Follow me," and everything changed.

This parable, in a sense, is the universal story of all of us who follow Christ. Father Andrew said, “There is such a thing as clock-time, and there is spiritual value, which is above time and belongs to eternity. Life is to be estimated not according to its clock-time length, but according to its eternal value. One rich moment is better than many languid years.”

R&D Can you recall the moment you gave your life to Christ...or the time period in which that happened?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, not only for that time I chose to follow you, but for all the rich moments of life in you.

Day 23

Read: John 3:16-21

Judgment

Many people fear the judgment of God. Non-Christians, convicted by their consciences, feel guilty and assume God is judging them harshly even though they have no relationship with Him. Pagans fear gods of nature, and gods of other religions are worshiped in fear as followers seek to appease them. Even some Christians view God, as He is revealed in the Old Testament, to be a God of wrath. Others, raised by overly strict parents or working under bosses who are harsh taskmasters, fear the judgment of God.

How wrong they are! Christ came to show us what God is really like. He loves everyone so much that He came into our world to live and die for us. Christ didn't come to condemn the world but to save it. “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil....But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light...”(vv.19, 21). The entire gospel comes into focus in our reading for today. God's love is not self-centered; it reaches out to all. To those who say that Christianity is too narrow because it requires belief in Jesus, the answer is that belief in Jesus is freely open to everyone.

Christianity is a faith rooted in love because God has shown us love. It is His love that judges us. For those who fear God's judgment, Father Andrew has said, “The judgment of God is not the judgment of one who wants to find out where we are going wrong in order to condemn us, but the judgment of one who knows we are wrong and wants to help us.”

R&D What do you say to the person who fears God's judgment?

Prayer: My only fear of You, Lord God, is awe over Your great love and mercy.

Day 24

Read: 1 Peter 2:18-25

Suffering

At the time Peter wrote this letter many Christians were household slaves. It was easy for them to submit to owners who were kind and considerate, but Peter is encouraging loyalty and perseverance even when faced with unjust treatment. In the same way, we should submit to our employers regardless of their manner of treatment of us. Our doing so may be the thing that leads them to Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit within us, the light of Christ should shine forth from us in all circumstances.

Suffering may come upon us in a multitude of ways. Sometimes it's our own fault. It can result from our own sin, error of judgment, or unwillingness to take care of our physical needs. Often, however, our suffering is not our error but the result of living in an imperfect world. It can even happen when we have been doing the right thing.

We should note, also, that it is easy to feel sorry for ourselves when we are suffering from one thing or another. It is in these instances that we need Christian friends who have experienced the same misfortune with which we are suffering. Ones who can come alongside us to give us assurance that we can survive. Likewise, this is a message to us to be prepared to help others who suffer what we have suffered.

Most important of all, we should never blame God for our suffering. Father Andrew: "Never judge God by suffering, but judge suffering by the Cross."

R&D Reflect on suffering in your own life. Who came alongside you to help you see it through?

Prayer: Help us always, Lord, to see in our suffering the message that You have for us in it.

Day 25

Read: Acts 12:5-17

Our Responsibilities

Today's story speaks for itself. We have the miracle of Peter being released from prison by an angel. Ultimately he comes to the house where people are praying for his release. When the girl who opened the door told the others that it was Peter, they thought she was out of her mind! This could, of course, lead to a teaching about having more faith in our prayers. But there are couple of other things to think about.

There is that famous heretical statement—that, unfortunately, many Christians think is in the Bible—"God helps those who help themselves." That statement is a justification for selfishly going ahead and doing what we wanted to do, hoping God might help. Theologically, just the opposite is true. We are to start by going to God for guidance about what we are to do, following that guidance, and being graced by the results, whatever they may be. I had a memorable experience of that many years ago.

There was a project I believed God had called me to undertake. I prayed about it. As I did so, I was overwhelmed by the obstacles that lay ahead. My fear of failure paralyzed me from action. I used continuing prayer as an excuse for not proceeding. And then it was as if God said, "Get off your knees and get to work; I'll show you how to do it!" And, of course, He did. Father Andrew said it this way: "When St. Peter was brought out of prison, the iron gate opened of its own accord. That he could not open. But when he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the door there did not open. He had to knock. Again, the chains fell from Peter, but he was told to put on his sandals: they did not put themselves on. God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves."

R&D Recall a challenge from God in which you had to cooperate by doing your part while He did His.

Prayer: Lord, don't let me get ahead of You nor let me stay too far behind.

Day 26

Read: Matthew 13:31-33

Kingdom of God

The two parables we look at today are about small things growing large. The mustard seed was the smallest of seeds yet it could grow into a huge plant. The idea of the birds of the air perching on its branches is a picture of the world coming together in that one place (i.e., the kingdom of God). Likewise, yeast is a minor ingredient in the mix but causes the dough to rise substantially. Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God which has happened as a result of his coming into the world may seem small, but ultimately it will be all-consuming.

In *Now, That's a Good Question!*, R. C. Sproul says this about the kingdom: "When Jesus came on the scene...he made the strange announcement: 'The kingdom of God is among you.' He said, 'If you see me cast out Satan by the finger of God, then you will know the kingdom of God has come upon you.' In a certain sense, the kingdom of God broke into history and began with the ministry of Jesus and certainly with the crucial moment at which Jesus ascended to the right hand of God for his coronation, where he now rules as King of kings and Lord of lords....What I'm trying to stress is that the kingdom of God has *already begun*. It hasn't been finalized and it hasn't been consummated—that won't happen until Christ returns in glory."

Father Andrew is making a similar point when looks to a future in which fulfillment happens, when all things come together in accordance with God's plans. He stated it this way: "Faith in God will be shown by claiming the whole of life, science, labor, art, sex, everything, as God's kingdom. The Church must claim the world, for the kingdom of God will only come when the Church and the world are one."

R&D *In what ways do you see, or not see, the kingdom of God coming into fulfillment? Explain.*

Prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

Day 27

Read: Matthew 16:24-27

Understanding

In using the illustration of his followers picking up their crosses to follow him, Jesus was painting a picture that was indelibly marked in their minds. In that day Roman crucifixion was a common method of execution. Condemned criminals were forced to carry their crosses to the place of execution. Thus, following Jesus meant the ultimate commitment.

The followers of Jesus knew the risk they were taking. They were a threat to both the Jewish leadership and their Roman overlords. The possibility of losing their lives was an ever-present reality. Real discipleship involved that type of commitment. If they were unwilling to stand up for their faith in Christ they risked losing eternal life with him.

The same, of course, is true for us. We are not likely to face the threats that the early Christians faced, but we do have to deal with the same temptations that would lead us away from Christ. And, in other parts of the world, there is actual suffering and fear of death for those who are loyal to Christ. Father Andrew said, "Whatever I may suffer, I can never suffer a tenth of what He suffered. And I know very well that I can only understand the temptations of tempted men because I myself am tempted. I can only have true sympathy with suffering people if I myself can feel pain. So this inexplicable mystery of suffering may be to us the way of sincerity,

may give us the chance of proving to others that we are true, of proving to ourselves and to God that we are worthy of the name of children of God.”

R&D *What type of cross are you currently carrying because you are a disciple of Christ?*

Prayer: *I thank You, Lord God, that I do not face the physical danger of discipleship, but I pray for my brothers and sisters around the world who are in harm's way.*

Day 28

Read: Ephesians 6:10-18

Reality

In our reading for today we are dealing with spiritual warfare. As someone has well said, “Jesus has defeated Satan, he has won the war for us; the problem is that there is still a ‘mopping up’ operation going on.” We need not fear the devil; Jesus has truly won the victory over him. However, we are naïve if we think that there is no spiritual warfare going on around us that can cause us problems.

Emily Gardner Neal said that C. S. Lewis contended that the devil is in reality a parasite, not an independent thing. He was created good by God, and fell from grace. He has perverted his intelligence and will, originally derived from God, to evil use. He can never triumph over God, because God will have the ultimate victory, but he can hinder and temporarily delay the perfect execution of God’s will for us.

One way to combat Satan and his influence on us is to “put on the whole armor of God” as Paul outlines in our Scripture passage. I do that at the first of every day and find it tremendously helpful in combating the temptations that Satan sends against me. Father Andrew knew the reality of having to deal with the spiritual world around us. He said, “The only real victories are spiritual victories. The only real defeats are spiritual defeats. However much things may appear to be won or lost on the material or physical plane, it is the spiritual sphere behind the outward appearance that is the sphere of reality. Prophets and saints have always known this.”

R&D *How conscious are you of the spiritual world around you. How do you combat evil influences?*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord God, for providing spiritual protection that we may thwart evil before it has an opportunity to harm us.*

Day 29

Read: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Treasure

The Parable of the Sower, already mentioned earlier in this series, is one of the most enlightening teachings in the Bible. It can be used to focus on how seriously we take the “message of the kingdom” (v.19) versus how focused we are on ourselves. As we have seen in other parables, the kingdom of God is the treasure we should seek.

The four types of soil represent different responses to Christ’s message. People respond differently according to their states of readiness to receive Christ. Some are too focused on themselves to take the message seriously, others are willing to listen but only slightly, being too shallow to absorb it fully. Still others are receptive, but they let the worries of the world choke the

message out of them. It is only those who fully hear and understand who can produce the fruit God wants of us.

How we value the message of the kingdom has to do with how willing we are to give ourselves to God. A disciple of Christ wants to be Christ to the world around him or her; focus on themselves is purely secondary. As Father Andrew put it: “If people give up on their faith in Christ because someone forgets them or slights them, it is clear that their real treasure is in being well thought of, and not in Jesus only.”

R&D Reflect on how you came into relationship with Christ by comparing yourself with the four soils.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, whenever I begin to think of myself more than the kingdom, please convict me, forgive me, and get me on the right track.

Day 30

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

Union

In our Scripture reading Paul is giving us rules for living in unity with one another in the body of Christ, the Church. We are to imitate Christ’s compassionate, forgiving attitude (vv.12, 13); let love be our guiding principle (v.14); let the peace of Christ rule our hearts (v.15); always be thankful (v.15); let the word of Christ dwell richly in us (v.16); and do everything in the name of the Lord (v.17).

The key to forgiving one another is remembering how often and how much God forgives us. I have been having the problem recently of feeling unforgiveness toward people in our day who are ridiculing Christians. The Holy Spirit has been impressing on me that I not only should forgive them, but I also—perhaps primarily—ought to be sorry for them; for their ignorance of truth will have eternally disastrous consequences unless they change. This is, of course, the way to look at the situation from God’s point of view.

Christians, especially, should live in peace with one another. Our mission in Christ is a mission of union with one another. We should go far further than love, peace, forgiveness of one another within the body of Christ. We should be reaching out to our brothers and sisters in Christ to meet their every need. And when there is nonetheless disharmony within the Church, we seek restoration through Christ. Or, as Father Andrew said, “The apostles had their differences; St. Paul sometimes withstood St. Peter to the face, but their union was in the Heart of Jesus. It is the same with us today. There are many divisions among Christian people, but when we are troubled about the divisions in the Church, we can remember that there is one Heart which is always faithful, and if we are tempted to despair of union among ourselves, we may, nonetheless, have hope of union in Him.”

R&D How strong is the unity within your community of faith? What can be done to improve it?

Prayer: Lord Christ, we are useless without you.

Day 31

Read: Titus 2:11-14

Character

In his letter to Titus Paul is noting two aspects of the Christian life: *living* and *waiting*. Both of these are crucial to us. Living in the manner God wants us to live is possible because we live for God—seeking to build His kingdom with the variety of gifts He has given us to accomplish that. And that is the very kingdom to which we are looking forward. Waiting—as we anticipate the glorious return of Christ—has benefits we can eagerly anticipate: there will be the personal presence of Christ; we will be redeemed from our sinful nature; and there will be the restoration of creation with God’s rule of grace according to His original purpose for mankind.

As we live and wait, our characters are being formed. We are shaped, first of all, by our environment—where we live, the surroundings in which we live, and the external factors that influence our lives. Secondly, we are influenced by the people we meet, whether we befriend them or distance ourselves from them. Thirdly, we are affected by our experiences of life, our triumphs and our failures. It is in and by these factors that we are tested.

As we try to live the Christian life and await being in the full presence of Christ, our characters are being formed. Father Andrew viewed it this way: “People’s characters are tested in three ways: by the circumstances in which they live, by the people whom they meet, and by the experience of their own failures. Their characters are tested by the degree in which these things draw forth from them love and not bitterness, a humble penitence and dependence upon God and not despair.”

R&D Reflect on how your character has been shaped by the factors mentioned above. Explain.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we await your glorious appearing, help us to form characters that please you.

Day 32

Read: Luke 12:13-21

Potentiality

In the Parable of the Rich Fool, the man depicted by Jesus started out simply being practical about his crops. He had an excess, so why not store the extra grain for a leaner time? He became seduced, however, by his good idea and built it out of proportion. Instead of thinking about those who were in need of his grain, he began to let greed dominate his thinking. He soaked himself in the image of laying up treasure for himself so that he could “eat, drink, and be merry.” Jesus uses the story to make it clear that we are to be rich toward God and not caught in the web of our own selfishness.

Perhaps an even more graphic illustration of how our sins can mislead us is the familiar story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-27). First, we find David staying behind when he has sent his troops off to war. While idle, he spies the beautiful Bathsheba bathing and is filled with lust for her. Next, he has her brought to him and commits adultery. If all of that was not enough, he arranges for Bathsheba’s husband to be killed so that he can have her for himself. What started as a relatively small sin built into a monstrous one.

That is what Father Andrew is warning against in his thought for today. He said, “We are apt to treat sin lightly, and yet, just as an acorn has in it all the potentiality of a tree, and that little thing, left to develop, becomes a immense thing, a great spreading oak, so a little selfishness has

in it the potentiality of the crucifixion of Christ. Leave a selfish sin to develop, and there is no human providence which can tell to what that selfishness may develop.”

R&D Reflect, if you can, upon a small sin you committed that soon spread into a more heinous one. Explain.

Prayer: There is the expression, Lord, “nip it in the bud.” Help me, when I am tempted to sin, to nip it in the bud.

Day 33

Read: Romans 8:12-17

Being Led

Paul is giving the Romans a choice: live by their sinful nature or live by the Spirit. If they live by their sinful nature they will die. On the other hand, living by the Spirit enables the follower of Jesus to put to death the misdeeds of the body and to live. The idea is that, if we can regard the sin’s appeal as dead and lifeless, we can ignore temptation when it comes.

We are then shown what it is like to be sons of God led by the Spirit of God. We are no longer slaves but children of God who can have a relationship with Him akin to the relationship of a human child to his Daddy. We may not always feel that we are sons of God, but the Holy Spirit within us remains our witness. He reminds us who we are and encourages us with God’s love (v.5).

What is this inner guidance like? When a television personality ridiculed the Vice President for making a reference to Christ speaking to him, I immediately became enraged at that person. Inner guidance from the Holy Spirit just as immediately convicted me of my sinful attitude toward that person and pointed out that a better way is to feel sorry for her ignorance and to pray for her to know Christ.

Father Andrew said, “We are all being led, whether we like to admit it or not, and we are all in some way leading others, because we cannot help influencing people by the way in which we live ourselves. We ought to think seriously by what spirit we are led.”

R&D Think of a recent instance of the Holy Spirit guiding you. Explain.

Prayer: Speak to me, Lord; your servant is listening.

Day 34

Read: John 3:1-15

Point of View

In today’s reading Jesus tries to get Nicodemus to understand things from a supernatural point of view. Nicodemus clearly had respect for Jesus, saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God” (v.2). Jesus immediately confounds him by telling him that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. He then emphasizes the point by talking about being born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus continues to be confused. He is having a hard time understanding what Jesus calls “earthly things” (v.12), so how could he possibly understand heavenly things?

Nicodemus had no frame of reference concerning the Holy Spirit, and Jesus gives him only a limited picture (“Spirit giving birth to spirit” (v.6) and the wind description in v.8). Per-

haps one of the reasons the Christian Church is no more powerful and effective than it is today is because so many Christians seem to fail to understand the Holy Spirit. Many Christians even seem to resent the term “born again” though Jesus states it as an essential element of being a Christian. How can we be Christ to the world today unless, at some point, we gave our lives to Christ (which is being born again) and began to allow the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Trinity) to direct our lives?

Father Andrew stated it this way: “The Holy Spirit is pledged to help us see things from the point of view of Jesus. When in our life some bitter cup comes to us, we shall be able to see in that cup love’s opportunity. If we yield ourselves in prayer to the Holy Spirit, things will begin to look quite different. As we see things from a supernatural point of view, we shall begin to meet them by supernatural methods. That is what conversion means.”

R&D How can you allow the Holy Spirit to be more effective in your life?

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and fill me with your power and guidance that I may love as Jesus loves.

Day 35

Read: Matthew 19:13-15

Interruptions

The disciples had already forgotten what Jesus had said about little children (18:4-6) and didn’t want him disturbed from what they regarded as his more important ministry. But Jesus wanted the little children to come to him. He loved them and, to him, they represented the kind of openness to God he would have liked for everyone to have. “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,” Jesus says (v.14), and he placed his hands on them in the form of a blessing.

To both Jesus and the disciples the appearance of the children was an interruption. We face these all the day long. I just had one while I was writing this. How do we regard these interruptions? The disciples clearly saw this one as a nuisance; Jesus saw it as an opportunity. The issue is how we regard this Christian life. If we are here to be Christ to the world around us, most interruptions are opportunities to be of service to others. They may fracture the continuity of our lives, but so what if it means we can help someone else. And, if we believe that the Holy Spirit guides our life, we may find that an interruption sends us in a new direction the Lord wants us to take.

Father Andrew looked at it this way: “Interruptions come into every life, and lives are very largely proved by the way in which interruptions are met. If we look back over the course of our lives, most of us will thank God for many of the interruptions, which perhaps revealed to us that some course of action was not right or prevented us from embarking on something that was wrong, or woke us up from soulless complacency. We may be sure that interruptions which are not our own fault have over them the providence of God, and come to us accompanied with the grace of God to draw from them what is for the shaping of our souls. Interruptions are part of life’s vocation, and if we see them in that light, they may alter our arrangements, but they will not alter our direction.”

R&D How do you tend to react to interruptions? Is a new way of looking at them in order?

Prayer: Lord God, help me to see in interruptions the purpose You have for them.

Day 36

Read: Galatians 6:1-10

Brotherhood

Following up on our last study, here Paul is encouraging Christians to do as Jesus would do...show love in action. We Christians need each other. That means that we have a right to expect others to help us in our need. Equally, we have a responsibility to meet their needs. The body of Christ—the Church—functions properly only when we work together for the common good.

Paul gets specific about the sort of things we should do: restore those who have sinned, avoid temptation, carry one another's burdens, don't think too highly of ourselves, test our own actions, carry our own load, be appreciative of those who instruct us, etc. We will reap what we sow (v.7).

However, we have to admit that times come when we are disappointed with our brothers and sisters in Christ when we see them failing to live by these responsibilities. It is also discouraging when we fulfill our responsibilities and fail to receive a word of thanks for what we have done. Paul, however, challenges us to keep on doing good, and trust God for the results. He says, "for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (v.9).

Father Andrew states it this way: "What are we here for? We are here for exactly the same reason that our Lord was in the world. He has revealed in His life what human life is for. It is for the fulfillment of a perfect sonship. Our Lord has revealed to us the Father; we are in our measure to reveal the Christ. Our Lord bore the world's burden revealing His Father as the everlasting Love. We are, in bearing one another's burdens, revealing the everlasting brotherhood in Christ."

R&D In what specific ways are you carrying out in your own life the obligations to love one another outlined by Paul?

Prayer: Make me an instrument of Your peace in the lives of others, Lord.

Day 37

Read: Ephesians 3:14-19

Knowing God

Paul tells us that God's love is total. It reaches into every part of our being. Its width is such that covers the breadth of our own experience while stretching out to the whole world. It is high enough to rise to the heights of our celebrations and jubilations. God's love is long, continuing to the length of our lives. It is deep enough to reach down to our discouragement, despair, and even death. Paul wants us to know that, when we feel isolated or rejected, we are never out of the presence of God's love.

The "fullness of God" (v.19) is seen only in Christ (Galatians 2:9, 10). We can only be complete by being in union with Christ and through his empowering Spirit. All the fullness of God is available to us in this way. But we must attain that fullness only through faith, prayer, and living for Him. Paul is telling the Ephesians, and us, to ask the Holy Spirit to fill every aspect of our lives to the fullest.

This closest of all unions with Christ can be lost if we become captives of the form of religious practice without the personal connection. That is what happened to the Pharisees; they

became so enraptured by the form of the faith that they forgot its spirit. Thus, Father Andrew warned: “It is one thing to know about God; it is another thing to know Him. It is one thing to go to religious occasions; it is another thing to go to God Himself.”

R&D How do you maintain a fresh and growing relationship with God? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, my life only makes sense when I am connected to You.

Day 38

Read: 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Pilgrims

Timothy was Paul’s protégé. He was a young man carrying a big responsibility. He had to earn the respect of the older members of his congregation in Ephesus, where Paul had sent him to counter false teaching. Apparently Timothy needed encouragement. Paul’s goal is to give Timothy some guidelines for effective leadership.

Paul encouraged Timothy to set an example for his people by the way in which he lived in love, faith, and purity. He was to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture and to preach and teach. He was to examine himself to be sure he was living an exemplary life and sticking to Christian doctrine. Also expected of him was diligence, perseverance, and faithful reliance on what had been prophesied of him when the elders laid hands on him.

Paul is telling Timothy to live out the Christian faith in the midst of his people to authenticate his ministry and thus guide them. Preachers in our day are most effective when they can give illustrations from their own lives to support the points they want to make from Scripture. Father Andrew said, “It is not much use pointing others to a road along which we ourselves do not propose to go. We can show people the best way by going along it. We can tell of its difficulties only by the honesty of our own experience. We are to be pilgrims, not signposts.”

R&D How have you helped others cope with life as a result of experiences you have been through?

Prayer: Lord God, help me to be more sensitive to the needs of those around me whom I might be able to assist as a result of my own experiences.

Day 39

Read: Matthew 7:21-27

The Will

According to *The New Bible Dictionary*, “The will of God expresses primarily His attribute of self-determination by which He acts in accordance with His eternal power and Godhead. Though God’s will cannot be said to be limited in any sense, His perfections ensure that He will never do anything that is incompatible with His nature.” As God’s people here on earth, we should always want to live in accordance with God’s will for us as best we can perceive it, thereby cooperating in God’s purpose for the world.

As a friend has said, “God’s will is always that He be glorified by His actions and ours. We are servants. God is glorified by our serving Him and others as He would have us do. We cannot be in His will without serving Him first and foremost.”

In today's reading Jesus teaches on the importance of doing God's will. He does it by talking about how essential it is to build on a sound foundation. The decisive issue is obeying God. To know how to obey God, we have to build on a foundation of knowing God's will so that we can obey it. Knowing God's will involves knowing Scripture.

Here's what Father Andrew said about the effect of God's will on our will: "He would not weaken a will by making things clear and easy for it; He would not bribe a will by some glittering promise of reward; He would not frighten a will by some threat; He would not break a will by force, or warp a will by something less than truth; He would win a will by a revelation of His love, love that was tested by hatred and stayed true, love that was tested by faithlessness and remained faithful."

R&D How often do you seek God's will in decisions you must make? How do you go about that?

Prayer: "Yet not as I will, but as You will."

Day 40

Read: 1 John 2:1-11

Wondrous

In addressing his readers as "dear children," John is doing so in a warm and friendly way. He is not patronizing them but showing affection. At the time of this letter John was a very old man who had spent almost his whole life in ministry. Many of his readers were undoubtedly his spiritual children. In a very loving way, he is writing about love.

The commandment to love others is both old and new. It is old because it comes from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18); it is new because Jesus interpreted it in a radically new way (John 13:34-35). Christian love is expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood (John 15:13). Our growing relationship with God will result in our growing love of others.

As promised at the beginning of this Lenten series, as we would look at quotes from Father Andrew, we would see that his focus was always on the love of God. As we end this series and Lent, John speaks to us of God's love that was uniquely demonstrated at Calvary (v.6). Father Andrew said it this way, "All of us have our parts to play in building up the New Jerusalem. He, Who came down from the mountain of prayer, had to ascend the mountain of sacrifice. The apostles had to realize that, if it is a wondrous thing to see Him transfigured on Mount Tabor, it was an even more wondrous thing to see Him disfigured on Calvary."

R&D Jesus tells us to take up our crosses and follow him, making it clear that there is sacrifice in being a faithful disciple. Sometimes that "cross" is living a day by day life of servanthood for the benefit of others. How is that working out for you?

Prayer: Lord, I am no use unless I am of use to You.

by Harry C. Griffith

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