



Father Fred's Forty Little Sins as confessed to Mother Agnes

Daily Meditations for Lent

(vii) Holy Week

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Monday in Holy Week

Father Fred:

We've been given some splendid donations towards the church recently.

Mother Agnes:

Really? How have you decided to use them?

F: I'm not sure yet. I don't want our church to become too materialistic and to preoccupy itself with bricks and mortar. Too much money can corrupt a church, just as it can corrupt a person. Remember what our Lord said about the temple in Jerusalem having become a den of robbers, instead of being a house of prayer.

A: You expect an ancient building to look after itself, then? I'm sure you wouldn't neglect the roof and downpipes of your country cottage. Are you going to fritter these donations away on some Fresh Expression of Church, as I think they call them these days, instead of ensuring that your church will still be there for those who come after you?

F: You forget, Mother, that I don't have a country hideaway. Maybe you're confusing me with Father Henry. And what's the point of having an immaculate empty church, except to make the Redundant Churches people happy?

A: You clergy never stop looking for new fashions to follow. Why can't you concentrate on doing existing things well, and caring for your flock, instead of this obsession with new church projects?

As in any line of work, it's not necessarily the most glamorous forms of ministry which are the most valuable in the eyes of God. Those which take place behind the scenes are far less likely to divert you into an ego trip.

Tuesday in Holy Week

Father Fred:

I've been reflecting on what you said yesterday, Mother, and wonder whether you are sometimes rather unready to embrace change. Jesus was very clear that sometimes the old wineskins won't do, and that you need new ones.

Mother Agnes:

Yes, but they're still wineskins. Sometimes I get the impression that today's Church has thrown out the good vintage wine and replaced it with fizzy lemonade - full of gas, loaded with artificial additives, and it soon goes flat unless you keep the stopper firmly in place.

F: That's cruel and narrow minded, and I'm glad you don't have to prepare joint services with other churches. At least you can enjoy your plainchant unencumbered by the need for liturgical compromises.

A: That's a blow aimed below the girdle, Father. Stop it now. You like plainchant as much as I do. But if you live by the doctrine of new wineskins, don't fall into the trap of making changes for their own sake. That's just a spin-off from a capitalist culture which relies on novelty and new products to prevent the economy from imploding.

F: You have an unexpectedly Marxist side to you, Mother. I'm surprised you still believe in God.

A: Just make sure that these new wineskins of which you seem so fond, Father, don't merely give you and your flock a temporary feel-good boost instead of nurturing true depth of discipleship.

Wednesday in Holy Week

Mother Agnes:

We're well into Holy Week, and we haven't really looked at anything that is truly demanding spiritually. Which of Jesus' sayings do you find hardest to follow?

Father Fred:

When our Lord says that in order to save your life you have to lose it, I always feel unsettled and inadequate. How can you do that, even if you don't take it literally? And it never seems quite enough to boil it down just to doing a few things that are beyond the call of duty, or devoting one's life to serving others, especially if you get a regular income for your troubles and a good pension when you retire.

A: So you don't find that Jesus' call to us to make deep sacrifices is compelling? Is this not a suitable challenge for your personal discipleship?

F: It's actually very hard actively to choose a life which will cause severe discomfort, and voluntarily to take up crosses which involve suffering and self-sacrifice.

A: You don't have to start by attempting an advanced diploma in discipleship, Father. Begin at the beginning, like the rest of us.

You can learn how to lose your life for Christ in the little things of life just as usefully as in the major decisions and crises which we all face from time to time. Start by trying to be less self-centred, and, if you persevere, the rest will follow.

Maundy Thursday

Mother Agnes:

How do you feel about Judas Iscariot, Father?

Father Fred:

He was a traitor and a thief who stole the money from the disciples' common purse. It's hardly surprising that he fell for a bribe and so enabled the Son of God to become the victim of what was basically an assassination.

A: I thought you were interested in new approaches to theology, Father.

F: What do you mean by that?

A: Can't you see that Judas was a human being like the rest of the disciples? I wonder if he had a mother to mourn for him when he died, like Jesus?

F: He'd done wrong, something very, very wrong.

A: Even though one can argue that he was just an unfortunate tool used by God to make Jesus' death and resurrection possible? Remember that he had a vision for a free nation, liberated from Roman rule. Surely he just made a terrible mistake? Who are you to judge him?

F: He still did wrong.

A: And so did he not fall within the embrace of that wonderful sentence spoken by Jesus on the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'? Use that sentence, Father, as your guide to human relationships, both those in which you are involved personally and those which you observe from the outside.

Good Friday

Mother Agnes:

You must be busy today, Father, and I expect your mind is on the three hour Service of the Cross which is taking place shortly. I'll be brief, therefore.

We've covered a lot of ground over the last few weeks: what I'd like you to do today, and you can do this during the silences which form part of the Service of the Cross, is go back over the things we've talked about each day since Ash Wednesday. It's all too easy to forget the significant points which have emerged, and to fail to allow them to penetrate deep within you.

So, Father, see today as a day for taking stock of where we've got to. Don't be overwhelmed by it all - but, as you meditate on the death of Christ on the Cross, remember that he died not just for the world as a whole, in some vague and general sense, but for each individual - including you.

Easter Eve

Mother Agnes:

So, Father, what do you think has been the particular value of our meetings over the last weeks?

Father Fred:

They have shown me that we need to look closely at the ordinary things of life if we are to see where we fall short of what God desires of us. I've seen that 'sin' isn't something just churchy and abstract, but is to do with how we relate to one another, how we run our lives, the little choices we make as well as the big ones.

- A: And I assume you can see, by now, that 'sin' is aptly described by the phrase 'missing the mark', which is of course the underlying meaning of the Greek word for sin which Jesus used. Sometimes we miss the mark deliberately, sometimes by accident, sometimes out of ignorance.
- F: Yes. And surely the Christian journey is to do with the personal transformation which comes from becoming less enslaved to patterns of behaviour which are not from God - and a key part of that involves opening oneself to the forgiving and compassionate love of God.
- A: Indeed - well said. I think you are beginning to understand what St Paul meant by 'freedom in Christ'. I wish you every blessing for Easter - and may you also learn how to communicate that freedom in Christ to all those whom you serve.