

Grace Notes

Friday, June 18, 2021

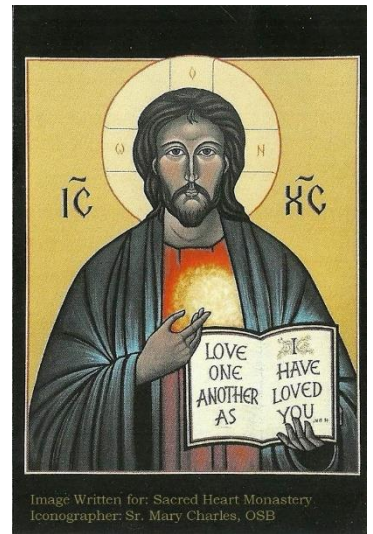
Dear friends:

As June unfolds I think we are feeling that we may be coming close to the end of the tunnel. It was very good to be able to have a couple of friends over for lunch on Saturday and we sat outside on a beautiful sunny afternoon to catch up with just being in each other's presence. It was a special gift to be back in church last Sunday with even a partial congregation and there was that same feeling of how special it was to be able to see each other in the flesh and not on a screen. I was also very aware of how much more every word was alive because we were there together. Perhaps that was why I paid such close attention to the words of the psalm – Psalm 92 – and found myself repressing a giggle over some lines: "In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap..." I'd like to think I can describe myself that way as I am frequently having to justify to those who don't know me very well why I haven't retired yet. As I have attended retirement parties in my honour on three separate occasions, I am able to retort that I have tried retirement three times and, as it didn't work, I don't think I'll do it again.



That led me to think about G.K. Chesterton's comment that: "It is the test of a good religion whether you can joke about it" which then popped up a couple of times during the week, reminding me that "there are no coincidences, just God being anonymous."

Chesterton continues, "Similarly, every joke is a "grave theological matter" because every joke is about the Fall of Man. You cannot even appreciate a joke unless you have a clear philosophy which can recognize what is right and what is askew. Furthermore, a good philosophy will not collapse under the lightness of a joke." He says, "We make fools of ourselves because we have wrong ideas. We can then laugh at how foolish we are when we suddenly see things clearly."¹ My appreciation for Chesterton may also be why I enjoy St Teresa of Avila so much. She was known for her sense of humour and for laughing at herself. She also was known for joking with God. One story has her admonishing Him when she slipped on a muddy slope during a rain storm: "If this is how You treat Your friends, no wonder You have so few of them!" And she taught her sisters, "A sad nun is a bad nun ... I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits ... What would happen if we hid what little sense of humour we had? Let each of us humbly use this to cheer others."² St Teresa of Avila by Peter Paul Rubens



¹ All Things Considered [G.K. Chesterton](#), 1908

² <https://aleteia.org/2017/10/15/the-unexpected-humor-of-st-teresa-of-avila/>

Earlier this week, I listened to a young person bemoaning that “no one ever listens to us.” As this was at an event where the young person had been welcomed and was speaking to a group of adults, who were listening intently, it seemed rather ironic that this was the refrain. It caused me to consider that just because one is listened to doesn't always mean one gets what one wants. I think of the many times as a parent I said, ‘no’ or ‘not at this time’ to my children: they seem to have matured without major damage. It made me think of a certain song by the Rolling Stones (recorded over fifty years ago for the first time! Arggh): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7pZgQepXfA> One can also make the point that, just because God doesn't answer our prayers the way we would like, doesn't mean they haven't been heard.



There are many posters on the theme of God not giving us what we want but what we need, or waiting to give us something better, or inspiring us to reach out to those who may be able to make what we want come about.

Sometimes God doesn't give you what you think you want, not because you don't deserve it, but because you deserve so much more.

Our faith teaches us that God hears our prayers, even when they are unspoken; think of the intercession we often pray that God will hear the private prayers we keep in our hearts. We may also recognise that God's response may be different from what we had in mind. Our prayer for the healing of someone we love may result in that person finding peace, rather than being physically healed, and we see God's hand in that.

There is also an old saying: “Be careful what you pray for; you might get it.” There used to be (long, long ago...) a short story in the Grade Ten English reading list entitled “The Monkey's Paw”³ about the backfiring of an amulet used for wishes. I remember our teacher making a case for the difference between wishes and prayers, and stressing that we should be very careful what we pray for, emphasizing that we shouldn't be frivolous in those things we ask of God. We have to be careful not to treat God as we might a lucky piece – and also remember not just to turn to God when we want something. Like any parent, God wants an ongoing relationship with us and not just to hear from us when we need a handout. In turn, Saturday's gospel reminds us not to worry about our needs, that God will take care of us.

With every blessing.

Gillian

³ <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-monkeys-paw/study-guide/summary>