

Ps 116 Tape

or Revelation,

(Apoc. 3¹⁷) In the vision of the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, St. John was told to write to the Church of Laodicea: "Here is the message of the Angel, the faithful, the true witness, the ultimate source of God's creation: I know all about you: how you are neither cold nor hot....

You say to yourself, 'I am rich, I have made a fortune, and have everything I want', never realising that you are wretchedly and pitifully poor, and blind and naked too."

Let us pray now our familiar prayer at Midday, but with a heightened sense of our need of God, trying to realise that the fullness of His riches can only be received by the poor in spirit.

PRAYERS

In the spirit of dependence on God, let's prayerfully listen now to

Ps. 22 ^{which} sings of God's care for His friends - a care symbolised in the psalm by the shepherd and by the ^{generous} host [who invites to a messianic banquet]

The devaluation of sterling over the weekend hasn't perhaps any direct connection with what I'd ~~planned~~ planned to talk about today, but it was a curious coincidence at least for me - though I know that to many people it will mean real hardship, loss and suffering. So the theme I chose is, maybe even more relevant today than I'd expected, though for a different reason. For I wanted to speak about poverty, what we call "poverty of spirit", which is such a noticeable feature in both the old and new testaments. The Biblical idea is something fundamental to our Christian lives, to our prayer, to our relationship with God. Without this poverty, our prayer for instance, the prayers we've just said together, are fruitless - they become the Pharisee's prayer: "I give you thanks O Lord that I am not like the rest of men - I do my duty, I fast, I pray."

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But what is this poverty of spirit? Well, it hasn't necessarily anything to do with material possessions - they are neutral, open to good use as well as abuse. Having them may make poverty of spirit more difficult to attain; and not having them doesn't automatically ensure the attitude of complete dependence on God which is at the root of the Biblical idea of poverty.

The Lord's poor, in the Bible, are people who have to and do rely entirely on Him for their support, justification, vindication. They have no wealth, power or influence to ensure that their rights are respected by others — without important patrons to lean on, they are the oppressed, the lowly, the destitute, the humble. The Old Testament prophets demand justice for ^{them, for} the weak and lowly, for those in need. The poor are those Israelites who submit to the will of God, who are thoughtful for others. It is to them that the Messiah will be sent, himself humble and gentle, the victim of oppression. Our Lady is a perfect example of these people, for whom God does great things because they are so open to him, put no obstacle in the way of His working through them. So she could sing "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord -- he has looked upon his lowly handmaid -- his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him -- the hungry, he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away --"

→ You see, we tend to surround ourselves with so many things to rely on, for security, with a wealth which includes not just ~~our~~ bank accounts or the loose cash in our pockets & handbags, but our prejudices, set habits, laziness torpidity. We provide for ourselves so that we've no need of

God. We are quite sufficient for ourselves, our knowledge of religion is adequate, our religious practices are all that they should be. We become rich, and so we can't hear God speaking to us. We can't understand His word, because really we've stopped expecting to receive anything from Him.

Faith means to believe that God has something to say to us, ~~with~~ to be awake and open to the possibility that what He has to say may change us, transform our lives — and this is always an uncomfortable thought. But God is in search of people who expect Him to give them everything, people who really believe that "with God, nothing is impossible," in a word, people who are really poor. It takes a lifetime to become poor: you'll never do so as long as you can give an account of it to yourself. It's like humility — when you think you have it at last, you can be sure you do not. The first requirement is poverty of spirit. We're all called to that, no matter the size of our bank account. This kind of poverty means that we understand our human limitations and have given up the ambition to be sufficient for ourselves, & that we turn to God in all our needs, with hope & with confidence.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" — God is already ruling in their hearts