

Lenten Journey with Henri J.M. Nouwen – Reflection 4

Introductory Bible passage:

You know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of my own accord: but he who sent me is true; you do not know him, but I know him because I have my being from him and it was he who sent me. (Jn 7: 28-9)

From the writings of Henri J.M. Nouwen:

Fellowship with Jesus Christ is not a commitment to suffer as much as possible, but a commitment to listen with him to God's love without fear ...

We are often tempted to 'explain' suffering in terms of 'the will of God'. Not only can this evoke anger and frustration, but also it is false. 'God's will' is not a label that can be put on unhappy situations. God wants to bring joy not pain, peace not war, healing not suffering. Therefore, instead of declaring anything and everything to be the will of God, we must be willing to ask ourselves where in the midst of our pains and sufferings we can discern the loving presence of God.

When, however, we discover that our obedient listening leads us to our suffering neighbours, we can go to them in the joyful knowledge that love brings us there. We are poor listeners because we are afraid that there is something other than love in God. This is not so strange since we seldom, if ever, experience love without a taint of jealousy, resentment, revenge or even hatred. Often we see love surrounded by limitations and conditions. We tend to doubt what presents itself to us as love and are always on guard, prepared for disappointments ...

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The world in which we live today and about whose suffering we know so much seems more than ever a world from which Christ has withdrawn himself. How can I believe that in this world we are constantly being prepared to receive the Spirit? Still, I think that this is exactly the message of hope. God has not withdrawn himself. He sent his Son to share our human condition and the Son sent us his Spirit to lead us into the intimacy of his divine life. It is in the midst of the chaotic suffering of humanity that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, makes himself visible. But can we recognise his presence?

Prayer:

Merciful God,
you know our weaknesses and distress.
Yet the weaker we are,
the stronger is your help.
Grant that we may accept with joy and gratitude
the gift of this time of grace,

and bear witness to your work in our lives.

(Adapted from '*Show me the Way – Readings for each day of Lent*' by Henri J.M. Nouwen)