

The Carmelite

News

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WHITEFRIARS — FAVERSHAM — KENT

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Make time for Friends

We cannot truly say that we have any sort of real relationship with a person we never think about, talk with or take the trouble to listen to. You might live with someone or work with someone for years but, if the situation is as frozen as two fish side by side in the fridge, the only relationship is one of place (—you get it?— plaice! When is someone going to shoot the man?) not of persons.

Friendship can fade because we don't take the trouble to keep in touch when we can. Even love can wither because we let other things like work, worry, people or even recreation occupy so much of our time that we find we have not given any to the one we love, to talk to them, to listen to them just to be with them because they matter to us. So love grows cold and, fools that we are, we wonder why. The reason is simply that we have not given them our time so that they can be a part of our lives and we a part of theirs. We must make time for friends and loved ones even if it means less time for other things.

MAKE TIME FOR GOD

This is as true about God and me as it is about my wife and me, my friends and me. I cannot say I have any real relationship with God if I never take the time or trouble to think about God, to talk to God, to listen to God, can I?

Sometimes prayer is easy. It arises spontaneously, just wells up out of our hearts. At other times we can't seem to focus our minds on God because we're so full of other thoughts or just too weary or sad to think at all. Sometimes we dry up, can't think of anything to say. Sometimes we are hurt and reject any sort of approach from friends, family, even God. We go into our shells like a scared snail or a worried winkler.

How do we focus the mind full of distractions, stimulate the weary or sad heart? How can we water the dry soul, encourage the hurt one to come out of its shell? There's no magic formula, I'm afraid, but there is a way, a simple way, that demands the minimum of effort but is, in my experience, very effective. It is to read something that speaks to our heart, to our present condition, whatever it may be.

READING IS SPEAKING

Yes, reading speaks to us. Have you never felt that? You must have experienced the feeling that someone close to you was speaking to you as you read a letter from them, a letter written maybe a thousand miles away and perhaps many moons ago. You can hear the lilt of their voice and see the love, the laughter, the compassion, the understanding in their eyes. You might even smell that appalling tobacco they smoke? Perhaps

that's stretching it a mite too far, but you know what I mean, don't you?

That's all very well, you say, and I have felt that way when someone has written to me, but you surely don't expect me to believe that I'll get a letter someday from God himself—always assuming it didn't get lost in the post? Well now, I suppose the post up there must be better than the post down here, since only good postmen get to heaven! I'm told the trouble is that what with inflation and wage increases the price of a stamp up there has rocketed from three Hail Marys to a whole Rosary, and there just isn't TIME—there we go again, lack of time! Let's be serious for a minute or two. Am I telling you in real earnest that God has written to you? Yes, I am.

*Some people have a problem
for every solution!*

GOD HAS WRITTEN TO ME

God wrote to me when Luke put pen to paper and wrote his account of the life of Jesus, his Gospel. God wrote to me when he moved King David to write his psalms. Every bit of the Old Testament and the New is God's letter to me: in my joy, in my sadness, in my fear, in my hope—in my every mood and condition. The whole of the Bible was written by people, for people and often, as in the books of Esther and Ruth, about people.

They wrote in their own style, from their own experience, with their own feelings but always under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. This is what we mean

by inspiration. God did not take the writers' own initiatives, feelings, talents—or lack of them—from them but so guided them that they wrote what God wanted them to write, and he did it “for our instruction”, as St. Peter says. God did not make robots out of the writers of scripture: he let them be themselves while at the same time he prompted them to write what he wanted, what we needed, because we need it.

DAVID AND THE PSALMS

Take King David for instance, a shepherd boy who rose to become a commander in battle and king of his people, Israel. There was a man if ever there was one: human like us and like us capable of great good and great evil. He experienced joy and sorrow, sin and repentance, fear and courage, love and hate, strength and weakness, trust and betrayal, the security of home, the strain of being hunted. He knew the blessing of peace and the devastation of war. He had joy in his children and bitter disappointment too. He knew the deep love of husband and wife and endured the loss of it. He felt the pride and desire and independence of youth as well as the dependence and feebleness and loneliness of old age. No wonder that God inspired him to write so many of the psalms!

His life reads like a fast moving action-packed novel full of the most varied and interesting characters, real-life people. If you don't believe me, try reading about him in the Old Testament.

We can learn a lot from this account, as God intended we should, but, for me, the psalms he wrote are even better. They are the outpouring of the human heart in

every mood from the peak of joy to the pit of despair, from bitter hurt to tender longing. Time and again as I read them I find myself saying, "That's just how I feel", or "Why didn't I think of that?" or "Yes, this is how I should see things, how I can see things, how I do see things, how I can try to see things".

My reading of the psalms starts with me speaking to God in the words of a man like me and it ends with God speaking to me in the words of a man like me—all I've got to do is listen.

LISTENING

Oh yes. Listening is far more important than talking. It is so in our relationship with friends. It is even more so in our relationship with God.

So reading can be talking and reading can be listening. To pick up the scriptures is already to be thinking about God, to put oneself in his presence sitting down there beside us. To read the scriptures is to talk to God, to listen to God: especially and above all to listen. Isn't that what we most need? And isn't thinking about God, talking to God and listening to God perfect prayer? It's so easy when we use the scriptures to help us. Why not try it regularly?

PICK and CHOOSE and BROWSE

Of course not every psalm, not every piece of scripture meets every mood every situation spot on, but I always find some phrase that hits the target every time. So feel free to pick and choose and, when you've got something that speaks to you, pause and browse on it and let it sink in to your heart. It isn't

how much we read that matters. It's how much we allow to sink in.

GETTING HER OWN BACK

You'll know that for a couple of years now there's been a spate of jokes at the expense of Kerry folk. Well, I heard of this girl from Kerry who was visiting her cousin in Dublin and getting a bit impatient with the smart jackeen's cracks about Kerry men. "Do you know", says he, "why Dublin men are better balanced than Kerry men?" "I suppose", says she with her sweetest smile, "It's because they have a chip on *each* shoulder". One up for the Kingdom!

OUR COMING NOVENAS—

December 25th - January 2nd
HOLY CHILD OF PRAGUE

December 16th - 24th
ST. JUDE

STOCKTAKING

Earlier in the year I asked you to pray for the General Chapter of the Order. I told you it was a sort of six yearly stocktaking, a period of three weeks when we examined our way of life and our apostolic work for God's people—for you and people like you all over the world. Well we sure examined ourselves! For twenty-one days, ten hours a day, with only three days off—and that's adding in the half days. As our working documents we had pages of analysis of the needs of the people among whom we worked, of how we tried to meet those needs, where we failed, how we might do better, how we could be better men of prayer, better religious, better priests, better brothers to those with whom we live in our communities. And this from all over the world: from the green acres of Wicklow to the sky-

scrapers of New York; from the forests of Indonesia to the pampas of South America.

Over a hundred Carmelites were gathered there from different cultures, different social and political conditions. Yet we found so much to unite us, so much to give to each other. There was a marvelous spirit of understanding and co-operation. I'm sure your prayers had a lot to do with it and I thank you all most sincerely. Please pray now that we will live up to what the Order asks of us—or at least that the Lord will help us to try to do so. Even He can't do the impossible!

FAMILY and FRIENDS and . . . ?

We started this letter talking of making time for friends. Well now, it's almost Christmas, a time when we should take special trouble to make time for our family and our friends. Sometimes I think that some people are so busy preparing for Christmas that they have neither the time nor the energy to enjoy it! Surely the important thing is to celebrate this great feast by making a bit more time for God, a bit more time for my family, a bit more time for my friends, and not to spend too much time on the preparation of material things that don't matter half so much as people matter. Christmas is about people not things.

Do you remember how, when Jesus visited Martha and Mary, Martha got busy preparing things? Jesus told her that the things didn't really matter, he just wanted to talk with them. "For heaven's sake, Mary", he said, "will you come out of the kitchen and let's have a chat. All I want is a cup of tea"—or

whatever they drank in those days. Let's rally round this Christmas and make sure we don't imprison mum—or anybody else—in the kitchen. And while we're at it let's make sure we have time and room at our Inn for Jesus, first by prayer—reflecting on the meaning of Christmas and letting Christ come into our hearts; secondly by inviting the poor and the lonely to share with us. If we don't ask them in, we don't ask *Him* in either. That is what he said himself: "As often as you did not do it for one of these, you did not do it for me."

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

ROMEWARD BOUND

Once more I'll be spending Christmas with our students in Rome. From them and from me a heartfelt "Thank-you" for all you have done, your kind thoughts and encouragement, your prayers. We'll remember you and yours in our prayers and masses, asking the Lord to grant you every blessing and happiness. May God walk with you now and throughout the New Year. Until next time—

Happy Christmas!

Our Lady keep you,

Edward Huguenot Carmi

THANKS

*Space prevents the publication of lists
but your intentions are recorded which
satisfies your promise to publish.*