

Brother Herbert's mother once typed for Wittgenstein and once said to him that she didn't understand what she was typing; to which he replied, 'I don't want you to understand, I want you to type' – or words to that effect. Now, blind obedience is a tricky thing – perhaps it depends on in whom we are placing our trust and the issue isn't so much about what we are being asked to do – which may or may not make sense to us – but the quality of the person who is making the request. If, again, Professor David Ford has it right, this is very much what is going on in the *Book of Job* – Dom Gregory's favourite reading in moments of crisis. Job's faithfulness is being grossly tested and many different arguments are put to him to persuade him to either admit a mistaken view of God or of his own virtue. He questions God and questions the goodness of God's creation. He is tempted to see all as without meaning, a cause only for despair, or, in the words of Simone Weil:

In the case of someone in affliction, all the contempt, revulsion and hatred are turned inwards; they penetrate to the centre of his soul and from there they colour the whole universe with their poisoned light.

(The Love of God and Affliction quoted p.105. D. Ford Christian Wisdom)

Now this, I would suggest, is a temptation we face today as coronavirus takes hold and begins to isolate us both physically and spiritually. It will challenge our view of one another and of God and any false piety which gets in the way of this. False piety such as Ahaz displays when he says *I will not put the Lord to the test*. Or the false piety of a magical view of God who takes pleasure *in holocausts or sacrifices for sin* and rewards such sacrifices with health and wealth and political well-being. The *Book of Job* is problematic in this regard because it ends with just such rewards for Job, but I wonder if this isn't akin to Samuel's choice of the good-looking David, despite the warning that God does not judge by appearances; it's a way of saying that, whether 'good' or 'bad' comes to us, is not a judgement on us, necessarily, or on God. Job is learning to love God 'for nothing' – that is, for the sake of God whatever happens to himself. And this is the faith we are being led ever more deeply into, as events take hold of us which we might imagine 'no good person deserves.' This is an invitation into a faith without horizons, into a reality without end. This is the step that Mary takes in her assent to a command she does not understand. It's an obedience which is blind to the consequences of her action, but not to the person who asks.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour