

A quote from Michael Casey to get us started (a Cistercian monk from Tarrawara Abbey in Victoria Australia) 'In the school of Christ we are, as the first disciples were, always learning. There is no prescribed course that we may follow diligently and so graduate. Our learning is not directed to absorbing a body of knowledge so much as making our own a distinctive way of life that is based on the Gospel. This is not book-learning but an apprenticeship under grace. Our call is to be attentive to the world around us and to all whom we meet, and to allow ourselves to be constantly reformed in the likeness of Christ: we are never the same yesterday, today or forever' .(Fully Human: Fully Divine p150)

I've underlined several salient points: 'making our own', 'an apprenticeship under grace', 'attentive to the world' and 'to be constantly reformed' and I've chosen this passage partly because I've just read it and partly because we've been talking a lot recently about Br Herbert again - he would have been 102 last Wednesday and his family have been visiting and putting his archive in order and it's prompted lots of remembrances including the Beatitudes read at his funeral where I focused on his being 'Blessed' rather than 'Happy' always and find myself perhaps needing to redress the balance today - for he was certainly happy as well as blessed especially in his last ten or so years. So you could say that we are looking today at the promises attached to each beatitude: ' theirs is the kingdom of heaven', 'they shall have the earth for their heritage', 'they shall be comforted', 'they shall be satisfied', 'they shall have mercy shown them', 'they shall see God', 'they shall be called sons of God'...'their reward shall be great in heaven'. Now we could, as at the funeral reprise each one but Pope Francis has warned that a sermon should be no longer than 8 or 10 minutes and have nothing to do with philosophy (or book-learning) to misquote him. So in brief, what came to mind to explain his later happiness was Dom Gregory's comment to me once that it was his job to look after the boundaries while we were free to play and this fits neatly with today's first passage from Zephaniah that

'In your midst I will leave a humble and lowly people.
They will do no wrong, will tell no lies...
But they will be able to graze and rest with no one to disturb them'

In Br Herbert's case of course part of his rest was to be disturbed by as many people as possible but 'disturbed' in the best sense and having them as visitors to be loved and to love in return. And this I think fits neatly with that quote from Michael Casey which we heard at the beginning for the beatitudes are not so much the imposition of demands from above but an invitation to play once again in the freedom of God's garden where God attends to the boundaries and allows us to 'make our own a distinctive way of life', 'to enjoy an apprenticeship under grace', 'to be attentive to the world' and 'to be constantly reformed'.

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