

If anyone said ' Praise the Lord' to Sister Anne, she would immediately add ' and pass the ammunition ' – a puzzling response for most of us today who have not been in immediate need of more ammunition, but not to Sr Anne who served with an anti-aircraft unit towards the end of the second world war. Indeed it took her to Belgium eventually and her first encounter with Schotenhof and the beginnings of her vocation as a nun. And it reminds me of that central tension in our faith between what we do for the Lord and what we allow the Lord to do for ourselves – highlighted again in that more biblical phrase ' The Lord helps those who help themselves ' and I wonder if something of that tension isn't present throughout today's readings especially that of the Gospel where Jesus refuses any ' help ' from the devil, any temptation that is to use the power invested in him by God for self-help, for illicit purposes. We are seeing here that tussle between good and evil, between Godness or selfishness or sin, which is central to all our lives and always has been: the story of Adam and Eve being a reasoning back into pre-history in order to carry this everyday dynamic back to its very beginnings- to highlight it then as a perennial issue. For each day we all find ourselves faced with a series of challenges which try us one way or the other, for the devil could just as well be saying to each of us – as to Jesus – if you are a child of God then you have the power to do this or that, to perform miracles (in order to impress) ,to plunder creation for enrichment (the prosperity gospel), to rule other peoples in order to bring them to salvation (to save Ukraine for example from de- Christianisation by the West) - in short to act as gods knowing the difference between good and evil. But since God doesn't operate like this, that is serving us in the cause of self aggrandisement, what is being called into question is the nature of God and our nature then as children of God. And what the story of Jesus demonstrates is a total focus on doing God's will rather than his own and having to work this out by the moment, so he's constantly referring back to what he knows of the Father already, constantly at prayer to know what he has to do for himself in the service of God – to overcome that is, that false opposition between what we have to do for ourselves and what we have to do for God -for if he is the Son of God and we are indeed children of God, then what we want will be what God wants and vice versa -echoing Eckhart's phrase that when we speak of the act of the just person as the birth of the Son in the soul we speak of the just person in so far as he is just. What we are talking of here is no less than the idea of mystical union but a union completely incarnated in our present moment so that we may find ourselves both praising the Lord and passing the ammunition – or, in less contentious terms ,living a life of love as did Jesus in the service of others despite the perennial temptation to live a life for ourselves only.

But it's a life lived now knowing that the grace of Jesus Christ is also at work and far outweighs the possibility of evil.

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