

There's a very strong emphasis in today's readings on God's initiative: in the first reading we hear

"Could anyone refuse the water at Baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?"

Peter hasn't planned this; God has by sending the Holy Spirit. In the second we hear

"this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away"

And lastly in the gospel passage

*"You did not choose me, no I chose you;
and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit."*

This is both a blessing and a burden both for Jews and Gentiles. For the Jews it means they cannot escape their role to be "a light to the nations" and the focus that the whole world then has on whatever they do. This is true now for Gentiles also, chosen by God to be grafted on to Israel's vine, for God has no favourites – the burden and the blessing are for us all, for all who wish to receive it. So the initiative is with God and our call is to receive, to accept, to follow. Dom Bosschaerts was once asked what his vision or plan was for the future of Vita et Pax – the founding inspiration for our communities here, and he replied *"I have no plan, I simply follow."* This may sound lax thinking but it subverts that essentially wilful or selfish initiative which is determined by our own self-will.

I've had a picture on my desk for the past week or two of what was probably Caravaggio's last painting: The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula. It depicts the moment when the Hun chief she has spurned shoots an arrow into her at very close range: she is shown bathed in white moonlight looking down in wonderment at this arrow which has pierced her body but not her soul. He in contrast is only partially visible but full of horror as he realises what he has just done through his anger and self will. He is the one in the shadow of death rather than Ursula. And we all know that terrifying power of our own self will when we loose it like an arrow at others; that determination to have our way at whatever cost. It's a very deep and primal emotion which, sadly, the world encourages through the concept of ambition and the self-made person. We are here to get on, to compete, to win. There's a place for will, indeed, but only within the will of God. Outside that will, unbridled, it becomes the ultimate weapon of self-destruction – as we see in so much of the present resistance to making peace with our environment, with our climate, with other nations. We vaunt self-will at our peril. But God offers us another way.

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