

A couple of Sundays ago in our Gospel reading we faced some of the real challenges we face in the life of faith. Jesus seems at times to ask the impossible of me – love me more than father, mother, brother, sister, child. It is sometimes hard to understand, hard to get a handle on what God is asking of us.

Hard to understand God at times.

Of course we can find ourselves having a difficulty with some of the apparently reasonable demands of Jesus. Paul in his letter to the Romans will talk of that struggle between what I know I should be doing and what I often all too easily find myself doing. I think it is put very nicely in the translation ‘The Message’:

What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. *Romans 7:15,16*

We all know something of the helplessness that Paul is talking about in this passage, that perpetual feeling of guilt at falling for the same temptation over and over again.

Hard to understand God; hard to understand me at times.

We feel lonely and God seems so very far away. It is at that point that verse 15 of our psalm 145 speaks to me today.

- 15 The Lord upholds all those who fall ♦
and lifts up all those who are bowed down.

This is at the heart of what Jesus is saying in our Gospel reading today, again reading from the ‘Message’:

²⁸⁻³⁰“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” *Matt 11:28-30*

This is grace. And grace is fundamentally about realising not only that I cannot do all this by myself but that I am not actually expected to do all this by myself. To go back to that extract from Romans, Paul moves from a cry of anguish towards a sudden vision of the answer.

²⁴ I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question?

²⁵ The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.

Romans 7:24,25

God is there. Even in his apparent absence he is there at our side. For God has found us in the person of Jesus Christ; in Christ God has experienced what it is to be human; in Christ we have encountered God as one who knows what it is to be me, what it is to be tempted, what it is to be lonely, to be misunderstood; knowing me he accepts me in all my weaknesses and contradictions and invites me to embrace him in trust and commitment. And it is as I am, that Christ says to me ‘Are you tired? Worn out?Come to me.

Get away with me..... I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

We find ourselves back with that simple and deeply profound word, grace. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. Learn to walk step by step with the Christ who accompanies us through life, whether it be in the office, the sports club, in the shops, in our homes or in the street. When we slip, as we will, he is there ready to forgive, ready to continue this journey of a lifetime.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. Let go, give God space to work in and through our lives – then we might even begin to understand what life is all about.