

Monday

Our Greatest Gift

As I grow older, I discover more and more that the greatest gift I have to offer is my own joy of living, my own inner peace, my own silence and solitude, my own sense of well-being. When I ask myself, "Who helps me the most?" I must answer, "The one who is willing to share his or her life with me."

—Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

*'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'*

(Luke 1.46-55)

Tuesday

Blessed to Be a Blessing

It is remarkable how easy it is to bless others, to speak good things to and about them, to call forth their beauty and truth, when you yourself are in touch with your own blessedness. The blessed one always blesses. And people want to be blessed! This is so apparent wherever you go. No one is brought to life through curses, gossip, accusations, or blaming. There is so much taking place around us all the time. And it calls forth only darkness, destruction, and death. As the “blessed ones,” we can walk through this world and offer blessings. It doesn’t require much effort. It flows naturally from our hearts. When we hear within ourselves the voice calling us by name and blessing us, the darkness no longer distracts us. The voice that calls us the Beloved will give us words to bless others and reveal to them that they are no less blessed than we.

—Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

(Philippians 4.8-9)

Wednesday

Born to Reconcile

If you dare to believe that you are beloved before you are born, you may suddenly realize that your life is very, very special. You become conscious that you were sent here just for a short time, for twenty, forty, or eighty years, to discover and believe that you are a beloved child of God. The length of time doesn't matter. You are sent into this world to believe in yourself as God's chosen one and then to help your brothers and sisters know that they are also Beloved Sons and Daughters of God who belong together. You're sent into this world to be a people of reconciliation. You are sent to heal, to break down the walls between you and your neighbors, locally, nationally, and globally. Before all distinctions, the separations, and the walls built on foundations of fear, there was a unity in the mind and heart of God. Out of that unity, you are sent into this world for a little while to claim that you and every other human being belongs to the same God of Love who lives from eternity to eternity.

—Henri Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home*

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

(Ephesians 2.17-20)

Thursday

A Prayer

O Lord, how hard it is to accept your way. You come to me as a small, powerless child born away from home. You live for me as a stranger in your own land. You die for me as a criminal outside the walls of the city, rejected by your own people, misunderstood by your friends, and feeling abandoned by your God.

As I prepare to celebrate your birth, I am trying to feel loved, accepted, and at home in this world, and I am trying to overcome the feelings of alienation and separation that continue to assail me. But I wonder now if my deep sense of homelessness does not bring me closer to you than my occasional feelings of belonging. Where do I truly celebrate your birth: in a cozy home or in an unfamiliar house, among welcoming friends or among unknown strangers, with feelings of well-being or with feelings of loneliness?

I do not have to run away from those experiences that are closest to yours. Just as you do not belong to this world, so I do not belong to this world. Every time I feel this way I have an occasion to be grateful and to embrace you better and taste more fully your joy and peace.

Come, Lord Jesus, and be with me where I feel poorest. I trust that this is the place where you will find your manger and bring your light. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

(Luke 2.6-7)

Friday

We Are Not Alone

God came to us because he wanted to join us on the road, to listen to our story, and to help us realize that we are not walking in circles but moving toward the house of peace and joy. This is the great mystery of Christmas that continues to give us comfort and consolation: we are not alone on our journey. The God of love who gave us life sent his only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that he walks with us. The challenge is to let God be who he wants to be. A part of us clings to our aloneness and does not allow God to touch us where we are most in pain. Often we hide from him precisely those places in ourselves where we feel guilty, ashamed, confused, and lost. Thus we do not give him a chance to be with us where we feel most alone. Christmas is the renewed invitation not to be afraid and to let him—whose love is greater than our own hearts and minds can comprehend—be our companion.

—Henri Nouwen, *Gracias!*

‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’*

(Luke 2.10-13)

Saturday

Claim Your Peace

I really wish you an ever deeper peace. I know that that peace quite often lives underneath the turmoils and anxieties of our heart and doesn't always mean inner harmony or emotional tranquility. That peace that God gives us quite often is beyond our thoughts and feelings, and we have to really trust that peace is there for us to claim even in the midst of our moments of despair.

—Henri Nouwen, *Love, Henri*

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

(John 14.27)