

Fri., 1st May 2020

This week we suggested you read a poem written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a German protestant pastor and theologian, who was involved in the resistance movement against the Nazi regime in the 1930s and during World War II.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943 and, whilst in prison, he wrote several letters to his fiancée, his family and his friends, as well as personal thoughts. These letters were published after his execution at the beginning in April 1945 under the German title “*Widerstand und Ergebung*” - literally: Resistance and Submission - translated in English *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

The poem entitled *Who Am I?* is taken from that collection of writings in time of captivity

The poem was posted on Wednesday (see <https://catholic.lu/2020/04/29/third-week-of-easter-text-for-spiritual-reflection/>). Here it is given again¹:

"Who am I?"

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me like a beaten army
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine,
Whoever I am, Thou Knowest, O God, I am thine."

¹ Source: <http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/who-was-db2.htm>

Fri., 1st May 2020**Dietrich Bonhoeffer is put to the test by his long period of imprisonment.**

He was a self-disciplined person (he would exercise every single day in his cell) and a very well-mannered person (he apparently could get along well with his wardens, who actually gave him the permission to write his letters).

But in his innermost sense, Dietrich Bonhoeffer tells us that he did not feel so confident, amenable, or friendly than he seemed to be.

Who am I *really*? he asks himself.

This weekend, inspired by this poem, we suggest several ways to relate with Scripture.

Read again the poem written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. You may already have been struck by his own way of expressing his inner questions about who he really is.

After you have read the poem, you may choose one (only one) of the various suggestions below.

The first way is to read (again) some stories of men or women in the Bible who had been given a mission but who were put on trial, sent to jail, and had to go through many other hardships (“tribulations”, as Paul would write).

For instance:

1. You may read (again) **the story of Joseph**, in the Book of Genesis, Ch. 37 to 50 (**Gn 37 – 50**). You may read it step by step, chapter by chapter, day after day. Pause wherever you feel drawn to turn to God when it rings a bell with your own life or experience.
2. You may read (again) some of the so-called “**Confessions**” of the **Prophet Jeremiah**. In echo to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s poem, you may especially read the following: **Jr 11, 18–12, 6 and Jr 15, 10–20**. Pay attention to the announced salvation beyond the darkness of the present time and the hardship faced by the prophet.
3. You may also wish to read (again) **the end of Paul’s ministry** after he arrived in Jerusalem and how he was sent to Rome, as narrated in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, from Ch. 21, v. 15 until the end of the Book (**Ac 21, 15 – 28, 31**). In addition to this, you may also read **the way Paul himself tells us about his experience** as “a prisoner of Christ” at the end of his life as he wrote it in his Second Letter to Timothy (see specifically: **2Tm 1, 1-14; 2Tm 4, 6-8.16-18**)

The second way is to pray with Scripture.

Suggestions are made below to pray with **the story of Elijah** (p. 4-5), and with a **Psalm** (p. 6-7).

Fri., 1st May 2020

General Scheme of a Prayer

I. Preparing my Prayer: Preambles

Make sure your smartphone, your computer and any other electronic device is switched off in order for you not to be disturbed whilst you take this time for silent meditation.

Determine how much time you wish to devote to this quiet time of inner reflection and stick to it (it may be 15, 20, 30 minutes, etc. Simply make sure that you can have that time in full for you alone without being interrupted).

Find a suitable place where you can really be in silence and find a suitable bodily position so that you are not disturbed by an aching joint or any other physical disturbance.

Turn inwardly to God "your Father who is in that secret place" (Mt 6, 6) and ask him for the grace to genuinely be entirely turned to Him, ready to listen to what He has to tell you through His Word.

Then follow the indications on p. 3 to 6.

N.B.: You may choose to experience such a prayer time every day. Each time though never forget to go through the preambles before you start praying. They are essential steps to prepare oneself to meet and listen to the Lord "who is in that secret place", waiting for me, waiting to talk to me, if only I am ready to take the appropriate means to listen to Him.

II. Praying

From page 4 to page 7, you will find diversified ways to pray with Scripture.

III. Finishing my Prayer: Talking to God "as one friend speaks to another" (*SpEx*, No. 54)

See at the end of this document on page 7 (after the tips of prayer of Part II) how you are invited to conclude your prayer.

Fri., 1st May 2020

II. Praying with Scripture

II.1. Praying with the Prophet Elijah

In Scripture, many narratives of vocation also tell us about the difficulties of people who were entrusted with a mission to come into terms with their entrusted mission, which does not necessarily fit with the way they wish it would unfold. Think of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so many others.

In echo to the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was fighting against a repressive, ignominious, and obnoxious political regime, that had also suppressed all religious freedom, we suggest that you pray with **an episode of the life of the prophet Elijah**, his encounter with God at Mount Horeb at a time when he is discouraged and has had enough with his apparently fruitless mission.

The full story of the prophet can be read in the Books of The Kings, in the so-called *Elijah Cycle* (1K, 17 – 2K, 2).

Elijah had made several miracles (1K 17) and had slaughtered on Mount Carmel 450 false prophets of Baal (1K 18), an idol that was introduced in Israel by Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, who had diverted God's people from the true worship to Yahweh.

After that episode, Jezebel was furious and wanted to kill Elijah. The latter had to flee to the desert to save his life. But he was suddenly assailed by doubts about his mission. God would provide for him (giving him some food and water) and would come and encounter him on Mount Horeb – the traditional place of God's encounters with Moses. But the way God would make him felt was not spectacular, daunting or frightening. It was a very subtle, a very mild, a very consoling way.

And Elijah's mission was thereby renewed.

First Book of The Kings, Chapter 19, vv. 1-16 (1K 19, 1-16)

1. When Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, and how he had put all the prophets to the sword,
2. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, 'May the gods bring unnameable ills on me and worse ills too, if by this time tomorrow I have not made your life like one of theirs!'
3. He was afraid and fled for his life. He came to Beersheba, a town of Judah, where he left his servant.
4. He himself went on into the desert, a day's journey, and sitting under a furze bush wished he were dead. 'Yahweh,' he said, 'I have had enough. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'
5. Then he lay down and went to sleep. Then all of a sudden an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.'
6. He looked round, and there at his head was a scone baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.
7. But the angel of Yahweh came back a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you.'
8. So he got up and ate and drank, and strengthened by that food he walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, God's mountain.
9. There he went into a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of Yahweh came to him saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'
10. He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me.'

Fri., 1st May 2020

11. Then he was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh.' For at that moment Yahweh was going by. A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake.
12. And after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, a light murmuring sound.
13. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'
14. He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, God Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left and now they want to kill me.'
15. 'Go,' Yahweh said, 'go back by the same way to the desert of Damascus. You must go and anoint Hazael as king of Aram.
16. You must anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat, of Abel-Meholah, as prophet to succeed you."

(Source: <https://www.bibliacatolica.com.br/en/new-jerusalem-bible/1-kings/19/>)

Suggestions to pray with this passage

Context of the passage: After the slaughter of 450 prophets of Baal, Jezebel wants to kill Elijah. The latter has to flee to save his life. Elijah is probably tired, and is beset by doubts about his mission.

Go through all the preambles listed on page 2 (I. Preparing my Prayer: Preambles)

Imagine a desert, or a parched land. Imagine Elijah, how he is clothed, what he looks like after he has run away to try and save his life to escape the wrath of Jezebel.

Ask the Lord for a grace. For instance: I ask the Lord to acknowledge his presence in my life and better listen to his call for me.

Read the text above again and pray with it, for instance as follows:

1. vv. 1-8: Elijah's Dejection and God's Providence

Look at Elijah. Imagine his inner feeling.

Look at the provident way God looks after him.

What does this trigger in me?

How does this relate with my own life?

2. vv. 9-13: God's Encounter at Mount Horeb

Look at the place where Elijah has found refuge in a cave at Mount Horeb.

Imagine the various subsequent phenomena and the way Elijah may have felt facing those cataclysmic events. Finally comes a light breeze that calms down everything. Look at Elijah's reaction.

What does this trigger in me?

How does this relate with my own experience of God in my life?

3. vv. 14-16: Elijah's Renewed Mission

Elijah is given a new mission, including the transmission of his gift of prophecy to a successor.

What does this trigger in me?

How does this relate with my own experience of God in my life?

To finish your prayer, go to p. 8

Fri., 1st May 2020**II.1. Praying with a Psalm**

Psalms are poems written by human beings who expressed in their own words the way they had experienced their relationship to God, through joys and hardships, trust and doubt, praise and demand.

The best way to pray with a Psalm is to read it in full once or twice and select one, two, max. three verses with which resonate in you.

You may relate them with your own life. You may simply find them nice and they ring a bell for you. Stay with them.

They may help you address God, to thank Him, to question Him, to petition Him, etc.

In echo with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem, we suggest you pray with **Psalm 139 (138)**. It is a Psalm praising God as Creator, a God who is provident for his all creation, and especially for the creature that I am as the author of this Psalm has experienced it.

This does not give ground to be frightened before God. This gives ground to acknowledge how great and provident God is, and the fact that he knows us more and better than we do even before our birth.

Psalm 139 (138)

1. Yahweh, you examine me and know me,
2. you know when I sit, when I rise, you understand my thoughts from afar.
3. You watch when I walk or lie down, you know every detail of my conduct.
4. A word is not yet on my tongue before you, Yahweh, know all about it.
5. You fence me in, behind and in front, you have laid your hand upon me.
6. Such amazing knowledge is beyond me, a height to which I cannot attain.
7. Where shall I go to escape your spirit? Where shall I flee from your presence?
8. If I scale the heavens you are there, if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are.
9. If I speed away on the wings of the dawn, if I dwell beyond the ocean,
10. even there your hand will be guiding me, your right hand holding me fast.
11. I will say, 'Let the darkness cover me, and the night wrap itself around me,'
12. even darkness to you is not dark, and night is as clear as the day.
13. You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother's womb.
14. For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. You knew me through and through,
15. my being held no secrets from you, when I was being formed in secret, textured in the depths of the earth.
16. Your eyes could see my embryo. In your book all my days were inscribed, every one that was fixed is there.
17. How hard for me to grasp your thoughts, how many, God, there are!
18. If I count them, they are more than the grains of sand; if I come to an end, I am still with you.
19. If only, God, you would kill the wicked! - Men of violence, keep away from me! -
20. those who speak blasphemously about you, and take no account of your thoughts.
21. Yahweh, do I not hate those who hate you, and loathe those who defy you?
22. My hate for them has no limits, I regard them as my own enemies.
23. God, examine me and know my heart, test me and know my concerns.
24. Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin, and guide me on the road of eternity."

(Source: <https://www.bibliacatolica.com.br/en/new-jerusalem-bible/psalms/139/>)

Fri., 1st May 2020

Suggestions to pray with this Psalm

Go through all the preambles listed on page 2 (I. Preparing my Prayer: Preambles)

Before you pray with the Psalm, imagine a place where you have already made an experience of God's presence in your life.

Ask the Lord for a grace. For instance:

I ask the grace to acknowledge that the Lord knows me better than I do and that he loves me.

or

I ask the Lord for the grace to accept myself as He accepts me.

Read the Psalm and chose one or two verses. You may be attentive to specific tones, such as:

- God's Providence (vv. 1-10);
- God who is the giver of life and wants it to be preserved (vv. 11-16:);
- The response I may give to God in my own life (vv. 17-24).

To finish your prayer, go to p. 8

Fri., 1st May 2020

III. Finishing my Prayer: Talking to God “as one friend speaks to another” (*SpEx*, No. 54)

Shortly before the end of the period I have assigned myself for this meditation (15 min, 30 min, etc.) I gather what the Lord has given me in the depth of my heart.

I let the Spirit inspire in me a prayer to the Lord:

- I may give thanks to the Lord for His goodness for me, for the people who have been part of my personal growth, my spiritual journey, etc.
- I may ask God to help me grow in my faith that God is provident for me.
- I may be inclined to ask for God’s forgiveness if there is something for which I believe I require His healing power and loving care, etc.
- etc.

In all cases, I finally formally end my prayer with the “Our Father”, slowly.

N.B.:

1. After my prayer - not during my prayer! - I may take some notes in a small notebook, to remember what has been most striking for me during that time of prayer.
2. I may experience such a prayer time every day. Each time though I will never forget to go through the preambles before I start praying. They are essential steps to prepare oneself to meet and listen to the Lord “who is in that secret place” (Mt 6, 6), waiting for me, waiting to talk to me, if only I am ready to take the appropriate means to listen to Him.