

The P
overty
of
Christ

An Invitation:

**“Just as I have loved you,
you also must love one another.”**

Life's Questions: Who am I? What do I want? ... to be? What's it all about? What's the point of it all? Why suffering? Why does it all have to be so hard? These are all hard questions. Most do not want to talk about them, for they unsettle, disturb and destabilise. Yet they must be answered, for if we cannot answer them, or do not see a way to seek and find the answers, we have little hope. Life, with all its hardships, struggle and suffering gets to be too much and we give up, we die — either little by little with a descent into bitterness, or something a little more desperate (suicide is a problem in today's age, especially among the young, among those who have no answers).



We live in a chaotic world. We need to impose some sort of structure on the chaos for us to be able to live. If we cannot come to some understanding or hold some kinds of certainty, or if the structures we impose to do this are not adequate, we become paralysed through powerlessness or fear, for we don't know what might happen next. One needs only to look at peoples' reaction after the events of Sept 11th when orderly life in downtown New York (and so in the rest of the Western world) was tossed on its head, when things which should not happen happened, when jets crashed into buildings that were solid but which came tumbling down. Or perhaps we might speak to one whose parent was psychotic, to one who as a kid had no understanding of what was going on, to one who never knew into what kind of world they would awake each morning. Worlds in chaos, nothing can be taken for granted. In the face of chaos we are left confused, we don't know what ... and so the questions arise, force themselves upon us. Life's questions are to do with tackling the chaos. We need answers, else we are swallowed up in and by the chaos and we become just another element of it.

Life's questions are essentially spiritual questions, for they can only be answered spiritually. It is the answers to these questions that form our spirituality (personal), which governs the way in which we relate in the world. Lack of spiritual development means that we do not have the language or the tools to construct our much-needed answers. Simplistically, religion provides us with a language with which we can speak of spiritual things and a framework within which we can discuss and develop our answers to these pressing questions. It even provides us with 'packaged' answers, which initially are adequate enough for us to operate in the world, till in time we come to find answers that are our own (personal).

The Book of Genesis tells us, 'Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, while a divine wind hovered over the waters. God said, "Let there be a vault

through the middle of the waters to divide the waters in two." And so it was. God called the vault *Heaven*.'



With this as a starting point, hope is born. No matter how threatening the chaos, over it all we can see an all-powerful God who is creative, who puts order into the chaos, whose *Will* does prevail — and this God has made me! Armed with this knowledge, *I* — me, the one whom this God wills to be — can go on, despite what threatens. Thus we can take to heart and can appreciate more fully the words of the Psalm ⁽²³⁾: “Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death, I should fear no danger, for you are at my side. Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.” In the face of all that besets us we can be ‘sure’ that this God will support us. Knowledge of this God is the staff we can lean on as we walk amid life’s seeming uncertainties ^(Isaiah 50:10), for this God’s word to us is: “Courage! I have conquered the world.” ^(John 16:33) In the face of chaos, in the end, our only armour and our only defence is our trust in this God, a trust that is often sorely tried and tested as we walk on in this world’s wilderness. ^(Mark 1:12-13; also the Exodus story)

It is this poverty that Jesus took to himself. As St Paul put it, “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as we are.” ^(Philippians 2:6-7) In the *Book of Genesis* it is sin that is portrayed as the chaos in our world. Sin entered the picture in the story of The Fall, and so the real cause of chaos in our world, it asserts, is ourselves. As sin became pandemic, the Genesis narrative moves on to the story of The Flood. In terms of our creation image, it’s as though the vault that divided the waters sprang a leak, such that the waters of chaos above the earth began to rain down on creation. As sin became more widespread, the rain turned into a deluge, causing the waters below to well up and flood the earth, wiping out all life on it. ^(An example of what is happening here can perhaps be seen in World War II Germany and the events that led up to it, with the rise of Nazism and its fruit, the holocaust.) Thus the waters that were divided rise up to meet, closing over creation and undoing God’s creative act. Chaos does threaten human life, promising to destroy it. In the life of Jesus one can see this played out. When human sinfulness finally got its way with him and nailed him to a cross, we are told: ‘It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land.’ ^(Luke 23:44) Here chaos is on the

verge of triumph, here even that first creative act, which began to put order into the chaos — “Let there be light!” ^(Genesis 1:3), is undone. This is the story of The Flood re-enacted, as it is in all human life at some point. Yet it was into the chaos, armed only with faith, that Jesus walked willingly. “He resolutely took the road to Jerusalem,” we are told. ^(Luke 9:51)

When we are oppressed, when, as the Psalm puts it, “the waters have lifted up their voice, the waters have lifted up their thunder” ^(Psalm 93:3) and our only prayer can be, “Save me, O God, for the waters have risen to my neck!” ^(Psalm 69:1), we are invited to follow the example of Jesus. In the face of fierce and determined opposition, though tempted to run away ^(Matthew 16:21-23) and only after a desperate struggle, Christ, did ultimately pray, “My Father, if this cup cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done.” ^(Matthew 26:42) If our only way is seemingly through the mighty waters ^(Psalm 77:19; Exodus 14:15ff), we are invited to make Christ’s prayer of trust our own: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” ^(Luke 23:46) We are called in what we do, in our walking on in the ‘valley of darkness’, to proclaim, taking up the words of the Psalm and making it the refrain of our life: “Greater than the roar of mighty waters, more glorious than the surgings of the sea, the Lord is glorious on high.” ^(Psalm 93:4) Clothed only in such trust, Christ walked on in the valley of death. For this he was raised to new life. Embracing this radical poverty of his, having our hope in God’s power as our only boast ^(Romans 5:2), we are called to walk the way of Jesus ^(Romans 6:4) — ‘confident’ that, should we die his death, we will be raised with him. ^(Romans 6:8) When we are oppressed by this world’s troubles, we need to say to ourselves, “Why so downcast, my soul, why do you sigh within me? Put your hope in God: I shall praise him yet, my saviour and my God.” ^(Psalm 42:5)

The mythic stories in Genesis are really stories of human nature: Creation is about my (a human’s) creation; The Fall is about my falling; The Flood is about my world dissolving into chaos. These stories tell us about human life, life which is developing, unfolding,

changing. So Creation is an ongoing event. Creation did not end at the beginning of the universe, nor at the beginning of the world, nor when humans were made, ... nor when I was born: I am not the person I was when I was born. Nor am I the person I will have become by my death. I am in a process of becoming; God is continually calling me into existence. The hard part is that God does not do all this creating all by himself; God wants me involved, too!

One way of looking at this is in terms of life's most interesting question, that quest which has us all seeking our 'holy grail': Who am I?

(see diagram opposite)

When we start off on our quest, when we are born, we don't know who we are; we are only potential; we are full of possibility. If you asks a child, "What will you be when you grow up?", today s/he will answer, "A fireman!" but tomorrow s/he will say, "A Brain-surgeon." And we laugh, for the child has no appreciation of the gulf between the two. But the child is right! Given the constraints of circumstance, the child can be anything; nothing is predetermined. What will be remains to be seen. Initially, as we set out on our quest, our ability to choose the way we go is severely curtailed by family, culture and environment. But as we grow, our autonomy increases and our ability to choose becomes less circumscribed — though our early shaping and forming will always exercise its influence on the way we go (Psalm 127:4), for where we come from is part of who we are! More often than not, most of our choices in life are not of any great significance, being more to do with maintaining our course. Occasionally, however, like when we finish school, or when we come to mid-life, we come to a crossroads where we really do have a choice, where we really do have to choose. These moments do significantly impact on the person we are to be, for if we go this way we will end up this kind of person, but should we choose a different route will end up a different kind of person.

What is important here to note is that the person I ultimately become is the result of the choices I make. It is as though my decisions are



God's decisions, as though I copartner God in my own creation. In this sense God does not 'care' who I become, what I make of myself, for he gives us the freedom and the responsibility to be who we will. God's call to us is that same call he put to the Israelites in that paradigmatic story of the spiritual life, the Exodus. There in the wilderness of Sinai God said to the people, "Look, today I am offering you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of YHWH your God ... you will live and grow numerous. But if your hearts turn away, if you refuse to listen ...

you will most certainly perish. Today I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life.” (Deuteronomy 30:15) In every choice we must make we are called to live, to choose life.

The compass God gives us to find our way in life is happiness. We may not always know what makes us happy, but we sure do know what makes us unhappy. When we find ourselves unhappy we know we need to change something. God’s call to us is simply our name. Only we can hear this call, for, ultimately, only we know what it means. “To those who prove victorious I will give the hidden manna and a white stone — a stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who will receive it,” says the Holy One in the *Book of Revelation* (2:17) to those who have listened to his call, to those who have come to life (John 11:43), to those who have come to be themselves. Our vocation is to be ourselves. What makes us happy is being ourselves, being true to our self, to who we are. The prophet Isaiah describes well our destiny, if we respond to our call: “Then the nations will see your integrity, all kings see your glory, and you will be called by a new name, one which the mouth of YHWH will confer. You are to be a crown of splendour in the hand of YHWH, a princely diadem, in the hand of your God.” (Isaiah 62:2-3) The hardest part is having the courage to be ourselves, for in so doing we risk rejection. God’s word to us is: “Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

When we find ourselves unhappy we must know we are not being true to ourselves. Maybe we have misunderstood what makes us happy and so have gone off in pursuit of pleasure, only to find an emptiness there. Or maybe we don’t like ourselves, because somewhere we have ‘learnt’ that who we ‘really are’ is not acceptable, not ‘good enough’, or just simply ‘no good’. We may remain for some time in our miserable state: enduring, alone, filled with envy or hatred, perhaps even aggressively lashing out. (Luke 15:14-16, 28-30) Or we may try to be someone else — someone ‘nice’, someone others approve of — but this is to be other than who we are, to be who we are not. Alas! None of this makes us happy. Rather we

are more likely to find ourselves fearful and anxious.

Sometimes, though, we need to/have to travel to this barren place, where our discontent is palpable, just to learn of our own inability, our own weakness, our own powerlessness. (Luke 15:17) For sometimes we can choose to be exceedingly deaf to the voice of the Lord’s call, so intent are we on doing our own will. (Isaiah 6:9-10) Thus we need to go to a place where all is quiet, where we are forced to be quiet — for all that we can do comes to nothing. Sometimes it is only here, in our abject poverty, that the Lord’s voice is able to break through to us saying, “What are you doing here?” (1 Kings 19:13) Here, if we care to listen, of the person we will become if we keep going down this road we will be convicted and know in our heart “This is not me”. For there in the quiet we will hear a still small voice say, “This is not the way.” Then, as the Psalm (95:8) urges: “If you hear his voice today, harden not your heart.” It is in our turning from what is “Not Me” that we can best understand the call to repent. One should be mindful, though, that though we may have taken the ‘wrong’ path, nothing is ever wasted, for in learning that “This is not me” we have part answered life’s question, “Who am I?” This answer we will carry with us wherever we go and it will influence all our future choices.

Who are we to be? In the story of creation we are told God said, “Let us make humankind in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves.” (Genesis 1:26) We are made in God’s image. When we are attracted to another, what we see in them is something of this divine in them (and it may be that we are the only one who can see it!). “The flash of it [love] is a flame of fire, a flame of YHWH himself,” as the Song of Songs has it. (Song of Songs 8:6) The Holy is attractive and we are attracted by it (one only has to look at how the world fell over itself trying to meet and be near a small, old, Albanian nun who worked the slums of Calcutta to know that this is so). (cf Exodus 3:2-4) If the one to whom we are attracted is likewise attracted to us, a mutual bond can form, which between a man and a woman is called marriage. Jesus has told us that where two or three gather

in his name he is there in their midst. ^(Matthew 18:20) In Christian marriage two gather in Jesus' name. Together they build a little church, a marriage church, which perhaps is the most basic of all churches, where they enter in to worship. Here our love for God is made real in and through our love of the other (as opposed to some warm, fuzzy, feel-good 'spiritual' emotion). Here our love for God has practical expression, which costs us. Here God's love for us is made real, incarnate, manifested, in and through the other's love of us. One can see why marriage is a sacrament, and why its dissolution is really a sacrilege.

This love the other has for us sees something Good in us, hence its worship value. ^(see Matthew 19:17) This love the other has for us calls us to be that Good, to let the Good in us be seen. This happens mutually; our love for the other does the same for them. Supported by this love we gradually grow in love, gathering the courage to be who we are: images of God in this world! Little by little we learn to love, first our partner, then our children, then ... as we grow in love our embrace goes out steadily wider until it embraces all the world. Thus do we learn to love, to love God as he ought to be loved, till at last we become love, God's love for all in the world. Thus do we become one: one with ourselves, one with our neighbour, one with all the world. ^(John 17:21) Thus are we healed and made whole. Such is the way of salvation, the way of life, the way to life and happiness. Hence we can see Jesus' command as a call, coming out of his love, to live: "I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, you also must love one another." ^(John 13:34) His command is also the tool we are to use to bring about the miracle of life. When we start off in life we are all self-ish. At the end of life, our goal is self-transcendence. It is love that brings about this transition. ^(1 John 4:19) It is love that enables us to love, encourages us to love, till at last we learn how to love, to be love — thus are we made fully alive and true images of God in the world, for God is love. In this way does the Church that we build become a temple wherein God resides. ^(John 14:23) In this way does the little Church that we build take on universal proportions. It is in this context that we can see the meaning of that much misunderstood and much mis-

used statement, "There is no salvation outside the Church." For we cannot just love, we have to love someone; our love must be real — just as we cannot be generous just by giving; there must be someone there to receive what we give, else it is meaningless. Salvation is never a do-it-yourself thing. For the religious, and all who are single, the same process must still occur somehow, for it is a human dynamic, that is, God's plan for us. "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body," as Genesis ^(2:24) puts it. We single people just have to find some other way of doing the same thing — hence the importance of community.

We are made in the image of God. Our quest in search of "Who am I?" is intimately connected with the Holy, the Sacred, the Divine. We have an in-built need to know God. For in coming to know God, we come to know ourselves. So our quest in search of "Who am I?" becomes a search for God. (Perhaps this is how we are to understand monastic life. ^(cf Rule of St Benedict 58:7)) This God-Self relationship is really a 'Ying and Yang' thing — much like the Taoist saying, 'The way to do is to be', can be turned around to read 'The way to be is to do'. The BE-ing and the DO-ing roll together, the one calling the other forth. It's as though we have to step out to be ourself for God to come forward to meet us on our way. As we begin to realise who we are, so do we begin to know who God is. As we come to know God, we begin to understand what we must do to be 'who I am'. As we draw closer we begin to see more clearly what God expects of us, to see just who this person is (Me!) that God is creating. Our efforts, then, to be ourselves, to be true to ourselves, are in effect our obedience to God. This is why our call to be is simply God's calling us by 'name', which only he and we know and to which we must respond. The name God gives us is indicative of whom we are to be.

When we start off on our journey in life not only do we not know who we are, but we also do not know who God is. In taking our poverty to himself, Jesus likewise had to set off on his journey 'without knowing where he was going'; he had to step out in faith,

trusting that God would lead him. (Hebrews 11:8-9) When Jesus came to know who he was, “You are my Son” (Mark 1:11), he understood who God was and so could address him as “Father”. In Jewish thought at the time of Jesus, what made a man someone’s son was that he did his father’s will. In coming to know who God is, so Jesus came to understand what he had to do. In St John’s Gospel, Jesus tells us: “Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only son.” (John 3:16) What Jesus did is how he understood what it means for God to love the world that much. (John 5:19) The God Jesus came to know was a God who reached out in love to those who do not return his love. So Jesus sat down with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ who would ultimately betray him. (Mark 2:16) In doing what his Father does, in doing what he had to do, Jesus found a new ‘poverty’, a poverty which sees us give away not only all the things we have but which invites us to give away also even our very self. (Mark 10:21) This is the poverty of love, love which gives its all till nothing is left. (John 15:13) In his loving us as he knows his Father loves us, Jesus was left destitute; he gave all he had, and was left with not even so much as a thanks to hang onto: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Mark 15:34) All is taken and used up. This is the poor man we see nailed to a tree. In doing what his Father does, Jesus came to know a new poverty, the poverty which is God! In his loving us as he knows the Father loves us, Jesus came to ‘know’ through experience the awful and terrifying reality which is the God who is love: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” — so much does God love us that he has poured himself out for us, spent! Like one on the edge of a precipice peering into an abyss as it invites and entices us to plunge its awful depths, so Jesus stared into the awe-ful depths of God’s love and was drawn into a bottomless pool of seeming nothingness. This terrible love which is God Jesus came to know, and it ‘crushed’ him. (John 16:32; Isaiah 53:10) So Jesus knew and understood who he was; so he knew what he had to do (John 10:18): “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” So did he become love; so did he reveal the God who is love. Thus may we understand Isaiah’s image of the Suffering Servant:

“Without beauty, without majesty,
no looks to attract our eyes,
a thing despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering,
a man to make people screen their faces;
he was despised and we took no account of him.
And yet ours were the sufferings he bore,
ours the sorrows he carried.
But we, we thought of him as someone punished,
struck by God and brought low.
Yet he was pierced through for our faults,
crushed for our sins.
On him lies a punishment that brings us peace,
and through his wound we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:2-5)

Here is true poverty; here is true love; here is God.

Ultimately, the real poverty Jesus took to himself was to be the love of God in our world. This he manifested for us on a tree. Thus was he his Father’s Son. The God he knows as Father is the God he came to reveal. This God he wants us to know, that we may know who we are and be who we are to be: son and daughters, coheirs with him, of the God who is love. So he commands us to love as he loved us. (John 13:34) “Love your enemies,” he says to us as he calls us to imitate him, “do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly.” (Luke 6:27ff) In this he calls us to embrace his poverty. (John 14:23) We can only hope that in our quest of “Who am I?”, in our search for God, that our eyes may be a little dimmed (Isaiah 6:9-10) that we may not see the truly awful depths of God’s love, the naked face of God that Jesus saw. (Exodus 33:20) For we, too, may find that we, too, will have to spend ourselves totally to be who God in Jesus calls us to be (Matthew 13:44-46); images in this world of the God who loves us so much. (John 12:24)

Our inheritance, Jesus’ gift to us, is his poverty. Perhaps to understand what this ‘gift’ might mean for us we might focus on the figure of Mary. Mary is introduced to us in the angel’s greeting: “Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.” The angel goes on: “Lis-

ten!” he says. ^(Luke 1:28, 31) This word means ‘hear and obey’. This is the stance of the poor, those who must wait upon another. ^(Matthew 20:25) This is the stance of one in right relations with God and neighbour, one waiting on God in neighbour. For if we do not listen, if we do not hear, the word that will guide us will not be God’s Word, the will that we do will not be God’s Will. Rather what we will proclaim in our word and deed will be our own, despite the fine motives and sentiments that we might couch it in. In all that we do, we, as true sons and daughters of Mary (and, for me, of St Benedict), are called to adopt a listening stance. ^(Rule of St Benedict. Prologue:1)

Mary was troubled by the Lord’s greeting. ^(Luke 1:29) She was told that she would bear a son who would be great and called Son of the Most High. ^(Luke 1:32) To this she replied, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” Like Mary, we are called to bear God’s Word and let it come to birth in us. The favourite prayer of the monk, then, is *Lectio Divina*, that slow, repetitious and careful reading of Scripture. This practice I would recommend to all. For in this way we really do listen; we take the Word into our self such that, in the end, it is enfleshed in our flesh, made incarnate in each of us. God’s Word to us in Scripture can be a troubling Word, for at times we do not agree with it, at times it can be contradictory, at times it is puzzling, at times it can seem like a Word for another time and place in ages past. At such times we, too, might ask, “How can this be?” At such times we do well to let it sit there as a question to challenge us. When she did not understand things about Jesus, Mary pondered them in her heart ^(Luke 2:19, 50, 51). If we do not do as Mary did, we will never understand, we will never be able to translate God’s Word to us into a Word for our times. In time we will come to see what it means, hear what it says, and so be able to put it into practice. ^(cf Isaiah 6:9-10) Listening requires that we take time. ^(cf Luke 10:38-42)

Because we let God’s Word become flesh in us, the Incarnation, then, is not something which is confined to the time of Jesus. For the Word still lives among us as one of us. ^(cf John 1:14) (Jesus himself has said as much. ^(Matthew 28:20; 18:20)) Because we let God’s Word come to birth in us, we are “conformed to the image of God’s Son, that

his Son might be the first-born of many brothers,” to borrow words from St Paul. ^(Romans 8:29) In a sense, then, God has left it to us: if God is to be in the world, we are to be him, to be Emmanuel/God-With-Us — to be his son/his daughter, such that it should be able to be said of us: “To have seen me is to have seen the Father.” For in truly Listening to God’s Word — hearing it and obeying it — we do the Father’s will; we are one like Jesus. Our call, then, is to truly be a son/a daughter of God, one who does God’s will, one who is the Word made flesh. “Rejoice, so highly favoured one!” Such a high calling should be enough to trouble us, too.

Jesus tells us about being son/daughter: “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing, and whatever the Father does, the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself.” ^(John 5:19-20) Well may we say, “How can this be?” for, as St John tells us, ‘No one has ever seen God.’ ^(John 1:18) Like Samuel we might say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.” ^(1 Samuel 1:9) But, like Elijah, for most of us the only word we hear is the sound of sheer silence. ^(1 Kings 19:12) Like Phillip, we might ask, “Let us see the Father.” To which Jesus merely says to us, “Have I been with you all this time and you still do not know me? To have seen me is to have seen the Father, so how can you say, ‘Let us see the Father’? Do you not believe?” ^(John 14:8ff) Jesus has said, “Where two or three meet in my name, I am with them.” ^(Matthew 18:20) But when we look around all we see is you and me! Our eyes are dim, our ears are closed. “How can this be?” All we can do is add our faith-filled “Yes!” to Mary’s ^(Luke 1:38), and wait with her for the Holy Spirit to come upon us with power ^(Luke 1:35), as has been promised ^(Like 24:49). In this way we will walk in the footsteps of Abraham, our father in faith. As St Paul puts it: “At the promise of God he did not waver in unbelief, but was empowered by faith, giving glory to God by being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.” ^(Romans 4:20ff) For this we too will be made righteous.

St Paul tells us, “The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.” ^(Romans 10:8) As we grope along in faith, blind and hard of

hearing, we need to be attentive to the still small voice within. In Matthew's account of the Last Day, the glorified Lord welcomes the virtuous with the words, "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." To which the virtuous reply, "Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink, naked and clothe you, or sick and visit you?" Jesus answers, "In so far as you did this to one of these least brothers of mine, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:31ff) Our lot is most often not an easy one. So the poor are with us always. The needy brother or sister, one with whom we come together in Jesus' name, is the One of whom, in a more exalted moment, God has said, "This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to him." (Luke 9:35) When we meet a brother or sister in need and feel in our heart an urge to do something to help (Romans 12:4-8), this is Jesus speaking to us (Romans 2:14-15), this is the Spirit of Christ at work in us turning our heart of stone into a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19) Our world waits in anxious hope, as the Psalm urges: "If you hear his voice today, harden not your heart." (Psalm 95:8) It is here that our *Lectio* bears its fruit. For it opens us to receive the Spirit of Christ, orienting us to Christ's way and teaching us to recognise/see the Christ in our neighbour — that we might know how to respond to our fellow in need such that he or she experiences God's love for them in Christ. When this Spirit comes upon us in power we are the Christ for our neighbour; we reach out to the needy and the stranger, the sick and the sinner; we do as our God does; we are his Son, doing our Father's will; we have entered the Kingdom. Our miserable world in its travail is longing for this. Or as St Paul has it: "Creation's anxious hope is eagerly expecting the unveiling of the sons of God." (Romans 8:19) We, who in listening to the God-who-is-with-us though he seemingly speaks only in silence, reveal the God-in-our-midst though there seems only you and me. Ears that cannot hear are unstopped; eyes that cannot see are opened — indeed, the Son of God is with us, making his Father known! (cf Matthew 11:4-5)

The poverty Christ bequeaths to us is just you and me in the silence.

There in our loving and being loved is made known the God who is love. To be able to make God known is his gift to us. (John 1:18; 17:6; 13:35) Ours is truly an incarnate God. If God is present, we make him present. This we feel in being loved. If we don't feel loved, if we don't experience God's presence, this is merely the experience of the God who loved us first (1 John 4:19), the God who loved us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8) It means neither that God is not present, nor that God does not love me. It is not a reason for me not to love, not to let God be present there in me. God's call to us is, "Whom shall I send? Who shall be our messenger?" / 'Who will be my Word to my People?' To which we can only reply in the spirit of Mary's willingness, "Here I am, send me." (Isaiah 6:8-9) This is the way of the poor Jesus. This way, our way, is simply the way of which St Benedict has said and sums up so well: "Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom." (Rule of St Benedict Prologue: 21) This is the way to being who we are ... to be: true images of God in the world, true images of the God who loves us so much. Our faith calls us to believe that God can do this in us. Our good works are informed/inspired by God's Word as we learn to walk in this way. But these good deeds of ours are more than that: they express our love, though perhaps clumsily at first; they are the DOing that makes our love real. (Rule of St Benedict Prologue:48-49) Through them we stretch out our hands to another, to others — to The Other — till at last we have spent it all, given our all ... to be Love, one in whom others can see God and experience his love for them. Thus do we join hands with the poor Christ, our brother, and walk together into the Kingdom. May God bring to completion what he has begun in us.

