

31 Days **With** **Sue Ryder**



An Exploration of Her Spirituality

Preface



I was fortunate enough to get to know Sue Ryder and Leonard Cheshire in the early 1970's. I worked with both of them in several capacities and we became close friends. As it happens, I was privileged to be with each of them the day before they died. They were two of the most remarkable people of the 20th century. Their extraordinary lives and experiences were forged in time of war and were interwoven with a shared and deep spirituality and humility. They were both devoted to prayer, and for each of them their work was based on prayer and waiting on God. There can be no doubt, that they could not have achieved all that they did unless their work was rooted in prayer and based on Faith.

I am delighted that Charlie Radburn, a hospice Chaplain, and previously Chaplain at the Sue Ryder Hospice at Leckhampton Court, Cheltenham, has found time to study and research Lady Ryder's spirituality. In this book he gives us all the chance to share in that spirituality. I believe that much of Lady Ryder's humanity and zeal to relieve suffering came from her deep love of God.

The legacy and ethos of Sue Ryder must be handed on to future generations. The Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship, in a small way attempts to carry this on through prayer and action - the work which Lady Ryder left us. I am sure that we shall all be helped in that task by this book.

Robert Clifton, Chairman of the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship November 2014

Introduction

I offer this booklet in the hope that it will be an encouragement to the many colleagues and friends who find themselves in the work of relieving suffering in its various forms. Sue Ryder herself was an example of someone who embodied the life and skills that made an enormous difference to many thousands of people, and by focussing our attention on her spirituality I trust it will offer us important clues as to her source of energy, and how this great work might be carried on by ourselves and future generations.

It is entirely possible that serving and supporting others in their worst times of life can wear us down, while the increasing demand for genuine compassion continues to grow, particularly in the field of hospice care. It is truly remarkable and in some ways mysterious, that Lady Ryder was able to flourish in such contexts. Far from being worn down, she got her energy from those in need! Suffering was just 'grist to the mill'. Just how did this work? To find the answer would be worth more than gold!

This is only one of the aspects of Sue Ryder that we will be focussing on, as we look in depth at aspects of her spirituality. As you read through one day at a time (and I think this is the only way to digest the material properly), may you also find inspiration to be the person you were born to be, and to fulfil your entire potential in this life.

Look to this day:
For it is life, the very life of life.
For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today well-lived, makes
Yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow
a vision of hope.
Look well therefore to this day.

Charlie Radburn, Chaplain, Marie Curie Hospice, Solihull November 2014

Sue Ryder and the Prayer Fellowship

Sue Ryder was born in 1923 into a large land-owning family in Yorkshire. The course of her life was to be determined by two early influences; by the example of her much-loved mother's voluntary social work; and by what she herself witnessed of the widespread social misery caused by the Great Depression.

When war broke out, she left school and volunteered to serve in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (the FANYs). She then served with the highly secret Special Operations Executive, created by Winston Churchill to co-ordinate Resistance activities in German-occupied Europe and she was eventually attached to the Polish section of SOE. What she witnessed left her not only with a passionate, enduring love of the Polish people, but also with a determination to relieve the suffering of a devastated continent. After working for the SOE during World War II, she devoted herself to charity.

In the midst of Sue Ryder's many practical efforts to relieve the suffering of post war Europe, she began to bring back to England survivors from the Concentration Camps who were sick and needed long term nursing. They came to her Mother's House in Cavendish, Suffolk, which became the first Sue Ryder Home. In 1953 she formed the Sue Ryder Foundation to more effectively provide homes and domiciliary care teams for the sick and disabled in any part of the world where assistance was required and where the opportunity presented itself. Today this work has become a testimony to the compassion, indomitable resolve and deep Christian faith of its Founder. In 1959 Sue Ryder married Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, one of Britain's best-known war heroes, and Founder of Cheshire Homes. He died in 1992.



Baroness Ryder was created a Life Peer in 1978, and gave all her time to the foundation she established. She continued to live in a small flat within the headquarters of the Sue Ryder Foundation in Suffolk and shared the life of the community there. She ceased to be a trustee of the Sue Ryder Foundation in 1998 and then formed a new charity, The Bouverie Foundation. After Lady Ryder's death, the name was ultimately changed to The Lady Ryder of Warsaw Memorial Trust.

In 1984, Sue Ryder had called together a group of volunteers and staff who were all practising Christians from the Sue Ryder Shops and Homes, to discuss with her the future of the Foundation. The group agreed to meet again at Walsingham in Norfolk, and from those gatherings a 'Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship' was formed. The Fellowship agreed to meet two or three times a year for prayer, retreat, discussion and fellowship. At about the same time, the Foundation had been in discussion with Sisters at St Katharine's, Parmoor, near Henley-on-Thames, about the future of their house. Eventually, the Sisters, with great generosity, gave the house and its contents to Sue Ryder. The Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship became a charity in order to receive this gift.

Since the death of Sue Ryder in 2000, the main task of the Fellowship has been to run St Katharine's as a Retreat House, maintaining the spirit of Sue Ryder, where individuals and groups can come for a times of quiet and reflection. It is open to all faiths and none, but it is a Christian-run house. Recently, a scheme has been started in the garden to give training and instruction to young men and women who have been homeless and who are now seeking to get back into society. This is all done with the help of volunteers.

The Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship meets at Parmoor twice a year for three days of retreat, prayer and discussion. It is open to anyone interested in prayer and the ethos of Sue Ryder which we endeavour to maintain. Lady Ryder cherished the efficient allocation of resources, compassion, respect for the contribution of volunteers and the spiritual dimension of life and work.

Day 1

Power From On High

Devotional Reading: John 15:1-17

I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last

What fascinates me about Lady Ryder was her wonderful capacity for making the world a better place!

She began her work amid the chaos and desolation of Europe at the end of the Second World War. During the conflict she had served in the Special Operations Executive, but with the return of peace she volunteered for relief work in Poland. Her duties took her into the concentration camps, where she met survivors of wartime atrocities - Jews, resistance fighters, political detainees and those who had been dragged from their houses or arrested in churches or on the street.

Homes of refuge were opened, not only in England but in Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia and Greece. Over time they developed and specialised in meeting all kinds of human suffering that was encountered. Eventually there were more than 80 homes, supported by a network of almost 580 charity shops across Britain and the Continent, supported by a huge network of more than 24,000 volunteers!

Robert Clifton, who had worked personally with Sue Ryder for many years, offers us a clue as to how, despite the human odds, she achieved so much good. 'One evening I was leaving Cavendish, her mother's home in Suffolk, to go home. It had been a long, hard and disappointing day. Sue walked with me to the door. We were both downhearted that we had

Do you want to make a positive difference? Today would be a great day to start!

apparently failed in an attempt to persuade a group of people that had come to Headquarters to work with the Foundation in establishing a new continuing care home. They had been a headstrong group and the breakdown of the negotiations was saddening. Sue was exhausted. She looked tired and frail as I said

goodnight. I left her and went to the car park and my car. The car was so parked that, as I sat in the driver's seat, I was looking through the window of the Chapel. There was this tiny blue figure, kneeling in prayer. I sat transfixed, because it was as if I could see the energy pouring into her, as if she were connected to a source of power from on high'.

What could I learn from her life that would spur me on to make a difference as well? It was a quest that has occupied me for several years. I have read her books, looked at magazine clips, seen the reports and encounters of others, talked to her closest friends, listened to her on the radio and watched her on TV. Gathering this material together and laying it all out in some kind of order, '31 Days with Sue Ryder' was born!

Will you travel with Sue Ryder and me for the next 31 days? I am sure that by the end of it we will be affected very positively. Perhaps we should start where she started every day - with prayer. As a young girl at Benenden School, Sue Ryder found inspiration in the following school prayer...



Grant, O God, that as the years pass by there may go forth from this place a great company who, strengthened by your grace and inspired by your Spirit, shall serve you faithfully, for the welfare of their fellow-men, and for the honour of your great name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Day 2

The Secret

Devotional Reading: Matthew 5.13-16

You are the salt of the earth

Christianity deserves credit for many of the humane, social, scientific, and cultural advances in the Western world in the last two thousand years. It has been responsible for the transformation of people, the valuing of human life, innumerable charities, compassionate care, hospitals and health care, education, liberty and justice, labour and economic freedom, science, art, architecture, literature, music, social welfare and many other positive changes.

Alvin J. Schmidt in 'How Christianity Changed the World', wrote 'On the basis of the historical evidence, I am fully persuaded that had Jesus Christ never walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, suffered, died, and risen from the dead, and never assembled around him a small group of disciples who spread out into the pagan world, the West would not have attained its high level of civilization, giving it the many human benefits it enjoys today.'

*One person with
God is a majority!*

I have always been moved by the lives of particular Christians who made a real difference to our world. I get inspiration from them. I relearn over and over that 'with God, all things are possible'. I am especially intrigued by Sue Ryder. What was her secret?

It had been observed that 'Sue's day begins early. She rises at 4.30 a.m. for morning prayers in the Chapel and finishes late at night with Bible reading and prayers. She says that these are God's hours and that her work depends on daily contact with Him'. Her secret seemed to be her personal faith.

Let other friends who knew her tell us more...'From the start I was impressed by the faith and dedication of Sue Ryder. I am not active in any way with any religious bodies tending to use them only for baptism, marriage and funerals! However, having been brought up as a youngster in the Church of England I have always had respect and a certain degree of envy for those true Christians whose faith sustains them so well throughout their lives. She was driven by a belief that anything was achievable if you had faith' (Geoff Bostock).

A smile lit her face whenever she was asked what kept her going all those years. 'My faith,' she says. 'Without it I'd be nothing.' This was the 'secret' she loved to expose at every opportunity. The secret is that with our co-operation, there is no limit to what God can achieve.

Prayer

You call us to service to be your eyes and ears hands and voice in this your world...

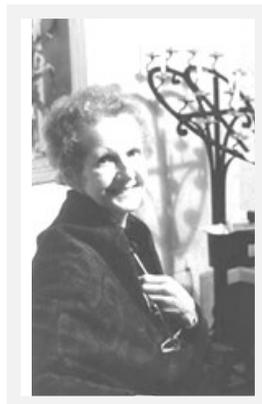
-To open our eyes not only to the beauty and love which you create but the injustice hate and suffering that mankind generates.

-To open our ears not only to the chattering of this coming week but the searching fears and questioning of all whom we shall meet.

-To open our hands not only to those we choose our lives to share but in welcome love and fellowship to all who you draw near

-To open our mouths not to speak mere human wisdom but the truths you lay upon our hearts - words for this your world.

*You call us to service to be your eyes and ears hands and voice...
In this your world.*



Day 3

Ancient Wells

Devotional Reading: Genesis 26.12-18

Isaac reopened the wells

Sue Ryder commented on our Christian heritage... *'these islands have known Christianity since the early days when the Romans invaded us, and have been Christian since the time of St. Ninian (c.360-c.432), St Columba (c.521-97), St Augustine (596) and St. Aidan (651) and began to spread the faith... Britain... has been a Christian country for many centuries, and drawn moral strength from its convictions. The beauty of our literature, music and art is enriched with its traditions and if we are to lose all this, we would indeed be the poorer'.*

Her sentiment resonates with many today. It longs to tap into a root that goes back a long way into our religious history. Today, as Sue noted, we see the remnants of its societal benefits, but like an old oak tree, 'a thousand years growing and a thousand years dying', we stand at a time when we long for new life to spring again, a truly Christian society to emerge.

How can the Western Church answer these longings?

The heritage of Christians through the ages should be remembered, revered and followed. Sue Ryder

Where can she go for answers?

Long before theological and political conflicts tragically divided Christianity, one of its most ancient and creative movements grew to prominence.

This Celtic church existed from the fifth through to the twelfth centuries. During it's time it kept classical learning alive while the so called Dark Ages were casting their long shadows across Europe.

Many Christians are beginning to reopen the spiritual wells of history to find the answers. They believe that the growing interest in Celtic Christianity is part of the Holy Spirit's answer to our prayers for the renewal of our life today.

I was moved to learn some of the characteristics of our early ancestors spirituality that excite and breathe new life into us... their respect for the world of nature, a love of learning, a yearning to explore the unknown, to push the boundaries, the love of silence and solitude, their understanding of time as being 'now', their appreciation of the activities of everyday life, their valuing of joy, the importance of formative friendships...

Several groups of Christians have delved into this ancient Celtic past, and have sought to 'reopen the ancient wells'. New experiments in religious and monastic life are growing, seeking to recover an ancient pattern of life and community rooted in God.

In one church where I ministered we discovered an old well near the back door of the Manse. Opening the lid and looking in, we found it full of deep pure water. Over the years it had been invaded by a mass of tree roots, shiny white in the darkness. No wonder the trees and bushes nearby were so vigorous and strong!

The ancient wells have much to inspire and nourish us today. Here, for instance, is a Celtic blessing. Allow me to 'say' it over you...

*May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever he may send you,
May he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm.
May he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you
May he bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.*



Day 4 Closer to Christ, Closer to each other

Devotional Reading Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity

In 'Child of My Love', Sue Ryder wrote 'In Britain a large percentage of the Foundations supporters, volunteers and workers are believers and if the work is to be properly consolidated and carried forward I am convinced that the religious side of the work must be acknowledged and fitted into the structure of the Foundation which is truly ecumenical', and that the Prayer Fellowship should be 'open to all denominations'.

Lady Ryder herself was brought up in the High Anglo Catholic tradition and remained there until she converted to Roman Catholicism. She used to say 'you know I have a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin.' In contrast I am a Baptist, but one Sunday recently I found myself preaching in the pulpit of my local Roman Catholic Church. It was an important moment for me, as I had never done this before, and I was more nervous than usual. But at the same time it was a huge joy as during the service the deeper reality of our belonging together in Christ began to emerge.

In my preparation I wanted to know how the Catholic Church felt about Ecumenism, and came across a wonderful booklet called 'The Search for Christian Unity', produced for churches by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. I felt my heart jump when I read: 'We are already in real communion with all the baptised... This real communion between us can be expressed in shared prayer and liturgy'. The precious words 'real communion' hit home.

Yet this was properly balanced by the reality of our divisions... 'We are not yet in full communion, because of differences in faith and understanding. Unrestricted spiritual sharing would be incompatible with this'. I suppose we would all feel the same way as we stand within our own traditions. But in the end God himself draws a circle of love around us all.

During World War I a Protestant chaplain with the American troops in Italy became a friend of a local Roman Catholic priest. In time, the chaplain who had moved on with his unit was killed. The priest heard of his death and asked military authorities if the chaplain could be buried in the cemetery behind his church. Permission was granted. But the priest ran into a problem with his own Catholic Church authorities. They were sympathetic, but they said they could not approve the burial of a non-Catholic in a Catholic cemetery. So the priest buried his friend just outside the cemetery fence. Years later, a war veteran who knew what had happened returned to Italy and visited the old priest. The first thing he did was ask to see the chaplain's grave. To his surprise, he found the grave inside the fence. "Ah," he said, "I see you got permission to move the body." "No," said the priest. "They told me where I couldn't bury the body. But nobody ever told me I couldn't move the fence."

Prayer

God, our Father, we are your people meeting together to adore You. We humble ourselves in your presence as your Church universal. Forgive our disunity. Draw us all nearer to you and therefore nearer to each other, that it may be known we are all your children and a sign of hope for our divided world.



Day 5

What about other Religions?

Devotional Reading: Luke 7.1-10

I have not found such great faith even in Israel

We live in an increasingly multifaith society. Where I work in Solihull is traditionally white, middle class and Christian, but is slowly feeling the impact of other cultures and the challenges they present. Sooner or later we need to know how we are going to dialogue with them. So where do we stand when it comes to our relationship with other religions? I suppose the best place for the Christian to start is to ask 'What would Jesus do?'

Jesus lived in a multifaith society. There was the official Roman religion, which contained a pantheon of various gods. Then there were the Samaritans, with their own brand of Judaism, and of course Judaism itself, containing several strands of thought. What was His approach?

Firstly we notice he did not compromise on belief. He knew what was true and stuck to it. So, for instance, in the case of the Samaritan woman by the well, he declared that 'they worship what they don't know; we worship what we do know'.

The Charity provides a house and grounds, St. Katharine's Parmoor, which is primarily a retreat centre and open to all faiths and denominations

Secondly, even though he didn't agree with other beliefs, he was in the habit of picking up on the things they have to teach us, even deliberately embarrassing His own people in doing so! One example is the story of the Good Samaritan, who truly cared and behaved like a real neighbour, as opposed to Jewish

religious leaders of the day. And in our reading for today, He highlights the faith of the Centurion, saying 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel'.

When we look at Sue Ryder's view on this matter, we find an identical approach. Holding firmly to her Christian roots, she nevertheless felt challenged by the fruits she saw in other faiths, which can at times challenge us. So she writes '*we live in a multiracial society... we have people from many different religions living in Britain now, but if you look at those other religions you will find that they have a 'rule of life' which they take great trouble to teach their young. It is the Christians who need to pull up their socks! ... I respect all genuine religions and wish to see those who hold them free to follow what they believe in. We have much to learn from many of them*'.



Prayer

For religious liberty; that all people of good will may work together for this fundamental right. We pray to the Lord.

For our government; that they may have the wisdom and courage to uphold religious rights and protect all people from being forced to violate their moral and religious convictions. We pray to the Lord.

For those called to work in a secular society, that they may be free to follow their own faith, while fulfilling their professional duties. We pray to the Lord.

For churches, agencies, employers, and individuals; that they may be free from government mandates that would compel them to compromise their beliefs. We pray to the Lord.

Day 6

Your Will, Not Mine

Devotional Reading Psalm 127

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain

It was an important moment when I realised that prayer was not so much about getting my will done in heaven, but about getting God's will done on earth! How could I miss such an important truth for so long?

A little boat was being paddled by a young boy over a lake, and just for safety it was tethered to the jetty by a long rope. All was well, until a sudden mist surrounded the small craft, and on top of that the growing darkness of the evening made it important to return to the safety of land. Not knowing which way to row, he decided that the only thing for it was to start pulling on the rope. In that way he would have to reach shore safely. So, grunting and groaning with all his might he pulled the shore closer and closer, and eventually found himself back at the jetty, safe at last.

Now to the lad in the boat, it might appear that he was pulling the shore nearer to himself. But for all his effort, he was the one moving, not the land!

*Your will, not
mine, be done*

Similarly, we may have assumed that prayer is about pulling God to our way of thinking. But all the time he is drawing us to him and to his way of doing things. We may exert great effort in prayer, especially if there is something we desire very much, asking him to bless our plans. But ironically we tend to end up doing things his way, or not at all!

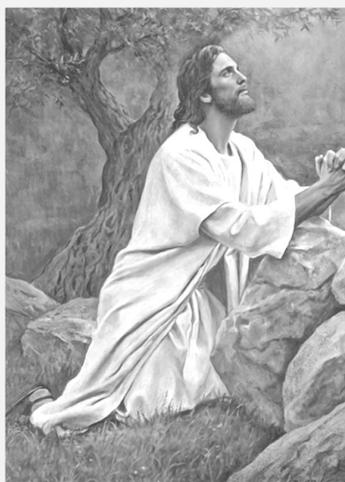
A young man, whose father was a church minister, aspired passionately to serve God on the mission field. One day he entered his father's church with a piece of paper. On it was written all the things he longed to do. He placed it respectfully on the altar. There was a silence. Then an inaudible voice seemed to penetrate his mind... 'Put a blank piece of paper on the altar so that I can write on it *my plans*'. It was a salutary moment.

This then is prayer: discovering what God wants and 'praying it down' into our world. King Solomon, the great empire builder, was well aware of this principle when he wrote Psalm 127, declaring that 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain'.

In 'Child of My Love' we find Sue Ryder's final word on the future of the Foundation, a quotation from Reverend Mother Stuart... '*We have to prepare for the future, and yet we do not know what it will bring. We have to find a standing ground so firm that nothing unexpected can disturb us, and so broad that it will carry any undertaking that we may have to base upon it, and so satisfying that it will take the place of all other satisfactions. There is only one thing that answers to this and that is the will of God*'.

Prayer

*I have no plans for this day
No destination in mind
No stops planned along the way
I am stepping out in faith
With you as my guide
I shall walk where you lead
Follow where you tread
Rest where you lay me down*



Day 7

Finding God's Direction

Devotional Reading: Exodus 40:34-38

You will be able to learn what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will

Quoting Sue Ryder... 'we need to renew our awareness of the all-prevailing presence of God. We need to be spiritually strong, to remain alert and watchful, praying at all times to discover the will of God. It is through the...Foundation that I can express this faith as a challenge to our fellow men and women'. And again, 'I believe that nothing in my life could ever have occurred except through God's will'. But how do we actually know what God's will is so we can follow it? Searching Christian literature on the subject and putting the results together I came up with the following gathered wisdom. But first a parable...

A certain Italian harbour can only be reached by sailing up a narrow channel between dangerous submerged rocks. Over the years, many ships have been wrecked, and navigation is hazardous. So to guide ships safely into port, three lights were mounted in the harbour on three huge poles. When the three lights are perfectly lined up and seen as one, a ship could safely proceed up the narrow channel. If the pilot sees two or three lights, he knows he's off course and in danger.

If you have done all you possibly can to discover God's will, you can move forward. God is responsible from now on!

God has also provided three beacons to guide us, and the same rules of navigation apply – the three lights must be lined up before it is safe for us to proceed. The three harbour lights of His guidance are:

- 1. The Word of God (objective standard)** The Bible is our standard for faith and practice. So we should ask 'Does the Bible tell me anything that would help me to know what God's will is in this situation? Is what we want to do in agreement or not with Christian teaching?'
- 2. The Holy Spirit (subjective witness)** The Holy Spirit led the early church and can lead us today. He may use a strong persistent desire, reveal something to us supernaturally through one of his many gifts, or speak to us through someone who is wiser.
- 3. Circumstances (divine providence)** Consider the circumstances. Remember, God is in control of all them. Things happen for a reason. Use common sense. Think things through carefully. Try to come to the best and wisest decision that you can. Look at your God-given gifts and abilities: let them find their expression. Be aware of obvious needs around us: Sometimes the need makes it clear!

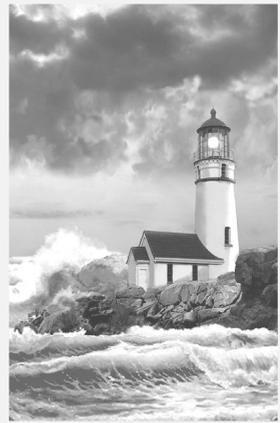


If these 'lights' don't all line up, we can drop anchor and wait till things are clearer. But if they do, we may move forward knowing that God is guiding us safely along his path.

'In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths' (Proverbs 3.6)

Prayer

*For each step that I might take, Be my guide, O Lord of life.
For each load that I might bear, Be my strength, O Lord of life.
For each mountain I might face, Be my power, O Lord of life.
For each river that might impede, Be my safety, O Lord of life.
For each place where I might rest, Be my peace, O Lord of life.
For each sunrise and sunset, Be my joy, O Lord of life.*



Day 8

Emotionally Free

Devotional Reading: 1 Peter 5.6-11

Cast all your care upon him; for he cares for you

With a work that became as big as the Foundation, there were great psychological pressures to be experienced. The worry could have gotten anyone down. How did Sue Ryder cope? What was behind that beautiful relaxed smile?

Let her answer for herself... *'I have always had a deep trust in God. So many times the work has seemed impossible to cope with and decisions have proved difficult to make, but an answer has invariably been forthcoming – not necessarily the one I search for. The words written by Browning often sustain me: Prayer is shutting out Fear with all the strength of Hope.'*

No human being could carry such a load and not suffer the consequences. She had to learn the emotional necessity of casting all her cares onto the broad shoulders of God.

A local vicar was in the habit of wandering around the church after the Sunday congregation had left for home, reflecting, tidying hymn books, picking up litter... winding down a little. Yet at the back of the church in one particular spot, there was always a piece of screwed up litter. It was annoying! Why couldn't they take their rubbish home with them?



One day, feeling in a more curious mood, the vicar decided to have a closer look at these pieces of paper. Opening one, he found to his astonishment that he was reading a prayer, imploring God for help. Each week he found the pieces of paper, each with a different prayer request.

Intrigued, he asked the offending parishioner about it. She said that she wrote the prayers and said them in church, but instead of taking her worries home with her she left them in the church with God!

In New Testament times, when a young ox was in training to plough fields, he would share the yoke with another experienced beast. Unable to know what he was doing or to take the heavy load, the older animal would take all the strain. Using this beautiful pastoral scene, Jesus applied it to His followers... *'Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'* (Matthew 11.29).

Sue Ryder taught us that whatever our responsibilities, we have every right to enjoy emotional freedom. She found the following scripture really useful in this regard... *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus'* (Philippians 4:6-7).

No matter how big problem, God is always bigger

'Casting your cares' means to literally throw them away. Throw some away today!

Prayer

Dear Lord, you know that I tend to get full of stress and anxiety. Please come near me and help me. I give you each burden, one by one, and lay them at your feet. Please carry them. They are too heavy for me. Replace them with your humble and gentle presence so that I will find rest for my soul today. And grant your gift of peace.

Day 9

It will be Provided

Devotional Reading: Reading Philipians 4.10-20

My God will meet all your needs

'Some years ago my wife was involved in organising a speaker for the annual service of 'Women's World Day of Prayer'. The service was to be held at our church in Bracknell. Lady Ryder had kindly agreed to be the speaker. It was arranged that I would meet her at Heatherwood and direct her to the church. This I duly did.

When she arrived I got into her car and started to give directions. By way of conversation, knowing that she and Leonard Cheshire lived in Suffolk, I asked if she intended to drive all the way back after the service. She replied that she had a meeting in Guildford on the following day. So I asked her where she was going to stay for the night. Her reply was staggering 'I don't know but God will provide'. Thus my wife and I became God for a night'. (Bill Adams)

This audacious trust in God which frequently roped others into the work at the same time was a beautiful quality that made everyone around Sue Ryder feel the 'electric' of sharing something very special. It thrilled all who were inspired to leave all and follow Christ's mission., knowing our needs will be met, one way or another.

Pip was a painter and decorator who recalled being asked if he would go to Hickleton Hall to meet Sue Ryder and to discuss with her the painting and decorating needs of the

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

premises. As he went from room to room making detailed notes of what she wanted he thought 'I have a job for life here'. However, he soon became aware that Sue Ryder achieved much by depending on volunteers. At the end of the tour they went into the very

small office and Sue said 'there is £25 in the bank. Do you think you can get your suppliers to donate paint and materials? Could you supervise a team of local miners in the application of paint, I am sure that I can get them to volunteer?' Pip was so impressed he said yes and that is how the premises were decorated. She had absolute faith that it could be done.

I worked with a 'faith mission' for several years and saw this kind of infectious faith in everyday practice. In the treasurer's office there was a large notice on the wall that I will never forget: WHAT GOD ORDERS - HE PROVIDES FOR. And it worked!

If we are sure of the direction God is leading us in, we can move forward confidently that He will meet our every need. No matter what the obstacle, with our trust and cooperation, God will eventually achieve all His purposes.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you told your friends not to worry about the future.

You showed them how to have the attitude of simple trust that young children have, so that they could place themselves into the caring hands of your Father.

And so I ask for the power of your Spirit that I may remain positive throughout all that is ordinary in my daily life.



Day 10

Hope

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 11.1-16

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hope is the conviction that no matter what the circumstances, God's plans for our lives are "for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

But hope gives more than rest and peace in the certainty that God will work everything out for our good. It doesn't leave us idle, drifting or just rocking on the front porch. Rather it is a source of power for everyday life. It's the thing that keeps us going against all the odds. Dynamic, active, directive and life sustaining, it puts us into gear every day.

Unfortunately, within the trinity of virtues mentioned by the Apostle Paul, hope is often overshadowed by faith, and certainly by love. But for Sue Ryder this quality was the thing that transformed faith into action, in the belief that our labours will make a real difference to our world... *'Hope never dies and I never, never give up believing that. As a Christian I mean it would be totally alien to do so. I think it was a Christian in the Soviet Union who had been through the Gulag who said that if we give up our faith, we cannot really be called Christians'.* One of her favourite poems began...



Child of my love, fear not the unknown morrow,
Dread not the new demand life makes of thee;
Thy ignorance doth hold no cause for sorrow
Since what thou knowest not is known of Me.

Have you heard the story of Pandora's Box? As the story goes, the Greek goddess Pandora was given a box with all the scourges of the world contained inside, but told not to open it. Eventually, curiosity got the better of her and she opened the lid. Immediately all the ills of the world flew out before she could close it again, and humanity descended into chaos. But not everything escaped. Hope remained trapped inside, until she opened the lid once more and let it go. The world became much more peaceful now. Only when hope was released did humanity settle down and begin to find strength to work towards a better society, knowing somehow that they would get there in the end.

'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' Julian of Norwich

Hope in God makes us bullish. It gives us power to live courageously. Josemaría Escrivá said 'I have seen many souls with such hope in God that it has set them marvellously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heart beat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way they may suffer and at times suffer greatly.'

Prayer

O Christ, our morning star, splendour of light eternal, shining with the glory of the rainbow, come and waken us from the greyness of our apathy, and renew in us your gift of hope. (Bede the Venerable)

Day 11

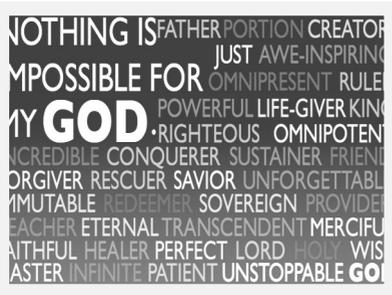
Nothing is Impossible

Devotional Reading: Nehemiah 1.1-4

I can do all things, through Christ who gives me strength

Lady Ryder wrote 'If one has ever had the privilege of working with those who have the will and the single-mindedness to succeed, and who believe in the light at the end of the tunnel no matter how dark and how interminable the tunnel may be, one knows that almost anything can be achieved'. Such optimism is astonishing, but well founded. For Sue Ryder knew that once you got wind of what God wanted to do, nothing would be impossible.

The book of Nehemiah records God's people returning to Jerusalem in 445 B.C. and rebuilding the broken walls. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem and uses his leadership skills to rally a citywide construction crew. He leads and directs the project; each family built the section of the wall directly in front of their houses, and with hard work, the wall was completed in less than two months. It was an astonishing example of project management that verged on the miraculous. Nehemiah wrote... 'so the wall was completed... in 52 days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God' (Neh. 6.15).



‘Teach us, Good Lord, to serve You as You deserve, to give and not count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Your will’ (Ignatius Loyola).

When the impossible appears, get excited. God is about to show you what He can do!

Sadly there is a tendency towards decay in any kind of work, including Christian work. Gradually strength and numbers are diminished, and energy with it. Slowly the ‘walls’ crumble until we are in danger of extinction. And then God wonderfully steps in, and the whole thing is turned around. What happened?

I have had the privilege of seeing God do this first hand with churches on the edge of closing their doors. With their backs against a wall, a new desperation grips the people. What happens? They cry out for help. And God responds. He steps in, and with his people rebuilds the work. The seemingly impossible is achieved!

Sue Ryder relished the impossible, and as many today can testify, it was not always an easy experience to share. Just think of the Sue Ryder Hospice at Leckhampton, Cheltenham for example. What a beautiful Tudor building it is today, a unique Gloucestershire gem. But once it was a ruin. In fact it took several trips to even find it. Yet Lady Ryder didn't see the broken down walls - she knew what God could do. Those around admit today they feared for the financial viability of this great project for the charity. But she was adamant and the walls got built!

Prayer of the Kikuyu people, Kenya

O Father,

our power is greater than all powers.

O Son,

Under your leadership we cannot fear anything.

O Spirit,

With you there is nothing we cannot overcome.

Day 12

Good triumphs over evil

Devotional Reading: Matthew 5 : 38 - 48

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

When we read so much bad news in the newspapers and in the media it would be easy to get depressed. It seems that we live in a world that is random and uncontrolled – where evil is triumphing over good. As the ancient psalmists often observed, the plans of the ‘wicked’ seem to succeed, while good people are subject to injustice.

This is why we desperately need to hear the voice of God as well as the voice of the world. The great theologian Karl Barth advised his students to ‘take your Bible and take your newspaper and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible!’

In the verse quoted above Paul is actually using the terms of warfare. He says, ‘Don’t be conquered by evil’ (that’s what the word ‘overcome’ literally means), but conquer evil with good’. But I find among Christians today a lot of 11th hour thinking, a kind of pessimism, a kind of hang in there by your toe nails attitude that says, “If I just don’t lose what I’ve got, I’ve won.” There’s very little spirit among Christians today that says, “Let’s go for it. Let’s get in there and win.”

All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle. Francis of Assisi.

Sue Ryder wrote, ‘Pope John Paul II said: ‘We are an Easter People’. We must leave Easter at the heart of our faith. I remember, too, Father Leo Smith writing in the Catholic Herald: We believe in the triumph of life over death, of love over hatred, of truth over falsehood, of light over the darkness of the night... God will triumph over evil and I have seen that in abundance’

Now when someone attacks you, you’ve got to use God’s method of responding, which is the most violent, the most aggressive, the most powerful way of handling evil there ever could be. But God’s weapons that are far more powerful than all the weapons of the evil one. He has given us, not the carnal weapons of man’s warfare, but spiritual weapons. You are to do good to those who persecute you. You are to do good to those who do evil to you. And you are to overcome the evil that they do by the good that you do in return. Only good is stronger than evil.

It has been observed that the War never ended for Sue Ryder. It just took a different form. It became a War on evil and suffering of every kind, and she moved about like a military commander, enlisting and directing all who would ‘fight the good fight’ with all their might. And she did this, knowing absolutely, that she was on the winning side! ‘Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain’. 1 Cor. 15.58

LOVE

is patient
is kind
it does not envy
it does not boast
it is not proud
it is not rude
it is not self-seeking
it is not easily angered
keeps no record of wrongs
does not delight in evil
rejoices with the truth
always protects
always trusts
always hopes
always perseveres
never fails

Prayer

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.*

Day 13

The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man

Devotional Reading: Acts 17.22-28

We are the offspring of God

You may have read the title for today and thought.. 'I don't believe that! 'The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man' was a religious cliché promoted for many years, especially by religious liberals. Continuing hostilities between and inside most nations today make the idea of universal brotherhood in this present world almost farcical'.

The fact is, however, that God truly is the Father of all men, in the sense that He created them all. 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?' (Malachi 2:10).

*All over the world the Spirit is moving
All over the world as the prophet said it would be
All over the world there's a mighty revelation
Of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*

That was the rhetorical question posed to Israel in the last book of the Old Testament. In the New Testament the apostle Paul confirmed the same great truth to the pagan

Gentiles. '[God] has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,' and 'we are the offspring of God' (Acts 17:26, 29).

Sue Ryder touches on this as she reflects on her wartime experiences... *'The War and its aftermath, followed by the struggle to maintain peace, have all been our teachers. They have taught us more clearly than ever before the oneness of the human family, the basic truth that we are all children of one Father. Surely, though we are scattered about, we are all meant to be part of a single Continent?'*

Let us observe what this important truth amounts to. Every person that lives, or that ever did live in this world, every individual whom God has created, has a Father in heaven. He may be as the prodigal son in the parable - alienated and far away, but there is still this indestructible relation 'of father and child' existing between them. Correspondingly we find ourselves mysteriously related in the human family, as 'brothers and sisters', each to be valued and loved by the other.

I have grown up in a church culture that talks about 'them and us', and was never taught what my relationship should be with those who don't share my beliefs. 'Surely God is only the Father of Christians?' we were told. In one sense this is correct. But this can leave me living in a kind of religious ghetto, unwilling and unable to join hands with others as they

are unknowingly moved by God to create a better world. However, the Spirit of God moves far beyond the confines of our own groups, breaking down the barriers that normally divide us and drawing many others into life. It is for us to sense this movement and to cooperate it and with the ultimate desire in God's heart - the salvation of the world.

Prayer

God our Father, the qualities I see lived out so well in other people are a reflection of your own goodness, and I know that I have much to learn from other people who reflect your image and likeness in different ways.

*Inspire me To respect others fully as my equals,
Seeing and loving in them What you see and love in them.*



Day 14

As Iron Sharpens Iron

Devotional Reading: Philippians 3.7-21

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ... Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. Paul

There is little more important than the goodness of the soil in which we grow up in - the early nourishment of our home environment - to form us and shape us. Sue Ryder writes with particular fondness of her mother, Mabel Ryder, a voluntary social worker in Leeds, who introduced her to life in the northern slums. *'This made an enormous impression on me'* says Lady Ryder. *'I used to spend a lot of time with the district nurses'*. And this is where her life of service began.

Later came the enormous suffering of war, the faith of the Polish people, and the rebuilding of their country. Then, back in the UK, she encountered the

sadness of those who lived without hope, with terminal illness, or without care. All these things, both positive and negative, helped contribute to the person she eventually became... *'As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another'* Proverbs 27:17.

I love to read the autobiographies of people like Lady Ryder, those who have allowed life to refine them to the point that they, in turn, could make a significant contribution to their world. They inspire me by showing the enormous potential of a single life willing to learn and grow. They nourish me better than any theoretical text could do.

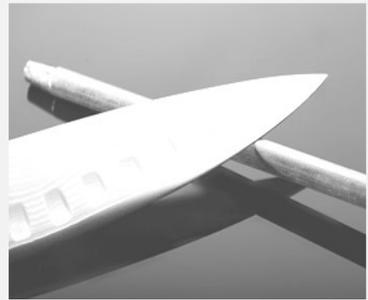
As we look around us we see a myriad of great characters, lived values, walking mission statements that throb with God-given energy. If only we were in the habit of learning from the best of them instead of competing with them... how quickly we would grow. The world itself would suddenly become a hothouse of character formation. And all for free!

Sue Ryder was not ashamed to say that she was influenced by others for the better, even when it hurt. Quite often the learning would come from the suffering, those she was trying to help. They were some of her greatest influences. Once a prisoner she was helping stung her with the words, *'I think you could have done more – that is what you are here for.'* Though we might imagine this remark to be rather unfair, she reflected on it deeply. Instead of taking umbrage, it drove her on to do even more than ever before.

Search out what God might be showing you through others today. Open your heart to those gracious influences, and grow.

Prayer

God our Father, if I could trace back through the last two thousand years, marking out routes from Jesus himself and then through people whose faith has touched others and so reached me, I would be astounded by the individuals I would encounter. I give thanks, Father, for all those people who have inspired others and played their part in passing on to generation after generation the living heritage of their faith. Especially I give thanks for the example of those who lived their faith through difficulties and hardship and persecution. I pray, Father, that I may grow through their influence in your faith and love.



Day 15

I saw Jesus

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25.31-40

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me

Sue Ryder knew nothing of compassion fatigue. Hearing that others need to be able to 'shut off' sometimes, for their own welfare, she found instead that proximity to those in need actually gave her energy!

'They may be lepers or children in the last stages of tuberculosis, or starving. No matter what they look like, they have something about them which is very beautiful and gentle. It's a sort of radiance, an image of God', she told an interviewer. 'They're very beautiful,' she said, 'I can't think of any other word. The real love that comes from the heart is what I feel for them. If you're very close to people who are dying in terrible circumstances, literally dying all around you, they become a source of strength itself.'



And so she took to heart the injunction of Jesus 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me' and devoted her whole life to fulfilling it. What she did for others she was doing directly for him.

A writer on Catholic spirituality says the most profound instance she's ever had of seeing Jesus in 'the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor,' as Mother Teresa would say, was when she encountered a crippled homeless woman sitting on the side of a street in Rome, Italy. Numerous tumors poked out of the woman's sparse grey hair.

I see Christ in every person I touch; it is as simple as that.

She recalled 'My heart was intensely affected at the sight of her and I wanted to scoop her up off the street and save her from her homeless life. Instead, through tears, I kissed her hands, prayed with her... I overwhelmingly saw Jesus in this woman and I wanted to love and comfort him in her.'

Theresa of Calcutta.

This is a very profound spiritual dynamic that we could all do with learning. Is there some work that you are called to but in which you find yourself flagging, or even appalled at the thought of doing? Perhaps there is some way of reframing it so that it is transformed into service directly to Christ Himself. What a difference that could make! How wonderfully motivating!

Prayer

To You, O my God Who is infinite love yet Who has called us to be perfect, even as You are perfect: Who so loved the World, that You gave us Your only begotten Son, and who has thereby given Your all, Your everything: Who emptied Yourself of Your Glory, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross, for us;

To You, we surrender our all, our everything, to be consumed by the unquenchable fire of Your love: We desire to love You even as your own mother loved You, to be generous as You only are generous, to give our all to You as You give Yours to us:

You have called us, O Lord, and we have found You in the poor, the unwanted, and the suffering, and there we will serve You unto death. (Usque Ad Mortem. A Prayer written by Sue Ryder and Leonard Cheshire in 1958)

Day 16

The Meaning of Suffering

Devotional Reading: John 9.1-7

So that the works of God might be displayed

Sue Ryder was born into a generation that was haunted by the wholesale slaughter of the First World War. Later, at a very young age, she was launched into the appalling cruelty and terror of the Second World War. There she learnt at first hand the horrors of occupation, the concentration camps and the extermination of whole sections of the population of Europe. She therefore determined to devote the remainder of her life to the relief of suffering in the name of those who had died in their millions, as a living memorial.

Surprisingly, despite these horrific experiences, it seems that she never had a 'theology of suffering' as such. She never attempted to 'understand' this seeming contradiction of God's love and the dreadful chaos around her. I expect that for her, as for most of us, it remained an unfathomable mystery.

Instead, she used suffering as a reason for change and as fuel to power humanitarian aid. If you like, she never asked 'Why?', only 'What should we do?' When you are standing in front of need, it is not primarily philosophical reflection that is required, but action!

And so the main response of Christians to suffering should be a practical one – to help those who are suffering, to follow the example of Jesus who wants us to fight against evil and to give practical help wherever possible.

Suffering is not so much to be thought about, as to be acted upon.

So when a blind man was brought to Jesus, with all the attendant questions about why he was born this way, his response graciously included an answer to those philosophical questions we may have, like 'Why was he born blind?' But his response was mostly practical. He had compassion on the man and made him well, displaying his loving kindness and power - 'the glory of God', in the face of human need.

A young girl was listening to her father in his study. He was the local church pastor, and was praying fervently for the poor of the parish. It moved her young heart to listen to his vivid description of their plight, and especially how hungry they were. She waited politely till he had finished, and when he had done so, she went in and asked for her father's wallet! He was taken aback. 'What do you want my wallet for?' he asked. 'Well', she replied, 'I want to buy those people the food they need and give it to them. I want to answer your prayers!'

Prayer

*Lord Jesus,
I give you my hands to do your work.
I give you my feet to go your way.
I give you my eyes to see as you do.
I give you my tongue to speak your words.
I give you my mind that you may think in me.
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.
Above all,
I give you my heart that you may love in me
And I give you my whole self
That you may grow in me,
So that it is you, Lord Jesus,
Who lives and works in me.*



Day 17

Salvation Army

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 6.10-18

The one who loves us gives us an overwhelming victory in all these difficulties

In World War II Sue Ryder served with the highly secret Special Operations Executive, created by Winston Churchill to co-ordinate resistance activities in German occupied Europe. She was attached to the Polish section, and what she witnessed from that time to the end of the war, especially the selfless cheerful courage of men and women embarking on the most hazardous operations, left her with a passionate enduring love of the Polish people.

However for Sue, the war into which she was launched at such a young age, never really ended there. The scenes she witnessed from those hideous prisoner of war camps still haunted

We are sent to make war and to stop short of nothing but the subjugation of the world to the sway of the Lord Jesus. William Booth

her. So when peace was declared the 'enemy', originally Nazi dictatorship, took on a new guise. It became poverty, sickness, prejudice and so on, and it had to be attacked and confronted with all the energy she could muster. She was determined and became very successful in enlisting a whole army of people willing to 'fight the good fight'.



'While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight, I'll fight to the very end!' These could have been the words of Lady Ryder, but in fact they belong to another soldier of Christ, the founder of the Salvation Army – William Booth.

This 'Army' began in 1865 when Methodist minister William and his wife Catherine, became concerned that the poor were not being welcomed into London's churches. William also began to feel that they not only needed to hear about Jesus (their spiritual need), but also required practical help (their physical need).

Going further back through the history of the church, and even at its beginning, we commonly find military language applied to Christian mission. I can imagine that as Paul was writing his momentous letter to the Ephesian Christians he was in fact struggling to find inspiration and encouragement to pass on. He was in a Roman prison. But suddenly, there it was in front of him. Looking the Roman guard up and down he saw it - the Christian as a soldier, part of an all-conquering army of God! And so we got our scripture reading for today.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we too are called to be a Spirit-filled, radical growing army of people with a burning desire to lead people into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, to actively serve the community, and to fight for social justice. Will you join up?

Prayer

Jesus Christ, conquering King, we happily enlist in your army, knowing that you are leading us to ultimate victory. Therefore fill our hearts with deep compassion for those who suffer, and with the courage to make a difference. And may the day of justice foe all come quickly.

Day 18 The will of God is all around us

Devotional Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Who is my neighbour?

When I think of modern day Christian work, it is often entered into far more cautiously than in previous times. We seem to say 'Our aim, first and foremost, is to ascertain the will of God. There are plenty of good things that we can choose to do. The problem is knowing which good thing God actually want us to do? Only when we know this should we venture forward. Otherwise we may just be doing things outside of his plan for us.'

This approach, in principle, is a healthy balance to frantic prayerless service. However, to be too precious about exactly what God wants before we move a finger, would have found little patience in the thinking and practice of Sue Ryder. For her the thing to do is obvious. It is standing in front of you. It is your neighbour in need! Sue Ryder helps us tip the balance back in favour of being pragmatic as well as spiritual.

As with so much in Christianity, there is a balance to be found. God really wants angels with muddy boots! Thomas Merton, a well-known writer on Christian spirituality, seemed to get it right when he prayed... "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it."

Live near enough to God, and even without thinking, you will know what pleases him.

So spirituality and practicality need to be kept together, but Lady Ryder gives us a firm shove back towards the practical end of things, a useful corrective for our own times. She lived out the values

of our reading for today – the parable of the good Samaritan. In this story the question 'Who is my neighbour?' is offered as a possible get out clause. Traditionally, the status quo at the time held that 'neighbours' were those who shared the same belief and lifestyle as ourselves, the 'household of faith'. But Jesus teaches that this is not so. 'Neighbour' is anyone at all in need. 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

Lady Ryder wasn't picky about who she helped. It was anyone in need, whatever that need might be. And this is liberating, refreshing for those of us who feel over-concerned about the 'will of God', paralysed by needing to know his entire plan first. If someone in front of you is thirsty, what is the will of God? If someone is naked or hungry or lonely, what is the will of God? To love our neighbour is to do the will of God.

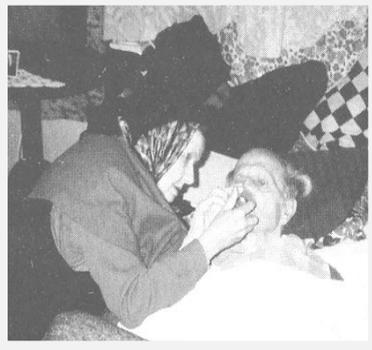
Prayer

*Lord, we ask you to take away from us
All that makes us less than human.*

*Strengthen us with the power of your Spirit
That our attitude and outlook may develop,
And our 'way of looking'*

May become more like yours.

*Looking upon people in the same way that you do,
and responding in the way you would respond.*



Day 19 The work we were born to do

Devotional Reading: John 21.15-19

Follow Me

A vocation (Latin: *vocātiō* "a call, summons") is an occupation to which a person is specially drawn or for which he or she is suited, trained, or qualified. The term originated in a calling to Christian ministry.

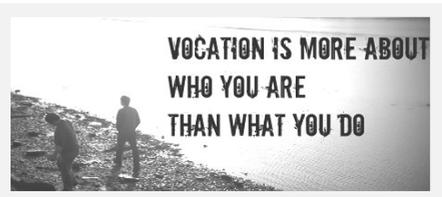
Whatever I read about Lady Ryder gives the impression of someone living out a 'vocation'. Whether it is the sheer intensity of her commitment, her incredulity when the idea of a holiday is suggested, or that the concept of retirement just wasn't in her thinking – it all points to a person who has discovered enormous purpose and exquisite joy in serving others. Any suggestion that she might stop working would be like telling her to stop living!

Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive. Howard Thurman

For most people work has an entirely different character. Listen to the testimony of one eager young man, Nick Williams... 'At the age of 23 I decided to be successful, because I thought that would make me happy. At the time success meant for me a car, salary, money, rewards, house, girlfriend(s), toys and trappings. So I set out to get them, and by the age of 28 or so I got many of them: a lovely flat in Fulham in London, a high powered job in computers in the City, a BMW and

lots of perks. But I was pretty confused, as I still wasn't very happy. I often felt insecure and depressed'.

'I had developed such a wonderful logical mind yet I realized that the pain I was feeling was my soul screaming out in divine discontent, saying to me: This isn't really you; you have another purpose and another path to follow, one that is more joyful, more authentic and heartfelt. Gradually I learned to listen to this inner voice more often and to act on it despite my fears, my doubts and anxieties. I began to pay more attention to what I really did want to create in my life, and shifted my attention away from what I did not want'.



A nurse who has spent many years working in hospice care and spending day after day with people in the last 3-12 weeks of life, sheds some light on this. Time and again, the most common wish was to have had the courage to live a life true to self. Quite often it has been planted in our hearts by God himself.

For years I held back from a vocation in Christian work because I was afraid that the deep desire to work with God was 'just me'. But at one point came the revelation, that this desire had in fact been given by God in the first place. It was His Spirit pulling me, leading me, inspiring me. As soon as I gave into it, the joy of serving with him blew me away. Today some think I am a workaholic, but truly, it is just a pleasure.

Are you living your God-inspired dreams?

Prayer

Lord, all my life I have wanted to find myself at one with you, doing the things you do. Grant that I may succeed in the vocation allotted for me, not by overworking but by overflowing.

Day 20

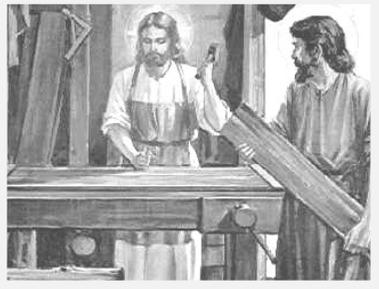
CEO - God

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 3.1-8

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

The reason that many of our current plans do not work is because we have no plan for time with God. Some days we pray a little, some days we read our Bible, some days we sing a few praise songs, and some days we forget all together. But there is no regular pattern, no plan, nothing written down that holds us accountable and reminds us of what we are trying to accomplish.

A routine strategy for spiritual growth will keep us motivated, on track and productive. Sue Ryder had such a pattern: *'She rises every day of the year at 4.30 a.m. and spends an hour in private prayer in the Chapel at the Foundations Headquarters at Cavendish in Suffolk. She includes the lighting of a votive candle and offers up every day to God, spending ten minutes in silent listening and contemplation'*. These she called *'God's hours'*. Then follows her daily routine: setting priorities and jobs; writing; going through the post; deal with correspondence; handover to day staff; food preparation begins; breakfast with husband; phone calls; send out the post; arrival and organizing of volunteers; greet visitors to the museum; meetings; lunch; prayers in between activities scattered throughout the day; occasional trips to visit homes and shops; the next shift begins; Mass in the chapel at 6 pm; sort out diaries; tidying and writing notes; more phone calls; night prayer.



When God made the world, He created the world of work. Laboring six days he beautifully illustrated the power of creativity, producing routinely something fresh and wonderful each day. At the end of it he set us to work as well, after the same pattern. And then there was the Sabbath, a day to remember that God was at the centre of it all and that we *'labor in vain'* if he is not taken into account.

*In all your ways
acknowledge Him, and He
will make your paths
straight. Proverbs 3.6*

Sundays at Cavendish were always different, when folk were able to attend worship within their chosen faith. Lady Ryder would relax in the evening and listen to *'100 Best Tunes'*. *'This helps me reflect upon what has occurred during the past week and to prepare for the days ahead'*, she said.

Routine gets a bad rap. We see it as dry, and life-sapping. That is true if you are in the wrong job. If you just go to work or do the same thing day after day because you feel you have to, or just for a wage at the end of the week, then you are in a *'dull'* routine. Yet, if routine is designed to help you meet an important need, a God-given goal, it can be a great tool to achieve just that!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you knew from experience what the world of work was like. In the carpenter's workshop you prayed, planned out your day and successfully provided for the needs of your family. Teach us how to pray and work as you did... To follow you into the solitary places to be renewed, and then down into the needy crowds to bring healing to broken lives. Help us to learn the rhythm of living in God and in our world.

Day 21

Small things

Devotional Reading: John 6.1-13

Do not despise the day of small things, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin

Lady Ryder wrote *'Experience as a field worker has taught me that it is the effort made by one individual that makes all the difference to another individual's life. It has shown me that no matter who we are or what our position in life, there is always something that we can contribute if we have the desire and will'*.

Mother Theresa reminds us 'Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.' And experience tells us that by watching people like this, others start to catch the vision, and before long a lot of small changes are occurring, making a great deal of difference to our communities than we ever imagined! This was certainly true for Theresa, and it became so for Sue Ryder.

We all have the opportunity to help create positive change, but if you're like me, you sometimes find yourself thinking, "I'm already really busy, and how much of a difference can I make anyway when there is so much need?" When I catch myself thinking that way, it helps to remember a story.

An old man had a habit of early morning walks on the beach. One day, after a storm, he saw a human figure in the distance moving like a dancer. As he came closer he saw that it was a young woman and she was not dancing but was reaching down to the sand, picking up a starfish and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

"Young lady," he asked, "Why are you throwing the starfish into the ocean?"

"The sun is up, and the tide is going out, and if I do not throw them in they will die."

"But young lady, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it? You cannot possibly make a difference."

The young woman listened politely, paused and then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves, saying, "It made a difference for that one."

The old man looked at the young woman inquisitively and thought about what she had done. Inspired, he joined her in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and very many starfish were saved.

You might not be able to change the entire world, but at least you can change a small part of it, for someone. And then you may find others catching your vision and joining you. Others watched Sue Ryder, saw the difference it made in another life, copied it, and thousands of lives were changed for the better, and this continues right up to today. Let us not despise the day of small things.

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin. Theresa of Calcutta

Prayer

Dear Lord, I thought I was here for big things, but instead you gave me little things to do. Allow me grace to accept this, and to believe that you can take my meagre resources and bless them to help others, as you took the five loaves and two fish from a little boy, and with them fed five thousand.

Day 22

The Weaver

Reading: Genesis 50.15-26

God intended it for good... the saving of many lives

Lady Ryder said *'I am conscious of our own immortality, and that whatever we do, wherever it might be, does count, not only here and now but in that great future for which we have all been created. ...even if we should not succeed in achieving our goal, the effort involved can be offered up to God who is our Judge and is able to turn every defeat into victory'*.

We do not think of Sue Ryder in terms of defeat, but as sure as we are all human, there were times when she felt discouragement, opportunities were regrettably missed, or offers of help thrown back at her. What do I do when failure stands at my door and accuses me? Her answer was to prayerfully leave it with God, the only one who can 'turn defeat into victory'.

At times life can seem very cruel, as it was to Christ Himself at times. At his worst moment there was the cry of incredulity... 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yet at that very moment, when even our Lord did not understand his Father's ways, the salvation of the world itself was being accomplished!

*My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
But he weaves steadily.
Sometimes he weaves sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget he sees the upper
And I the underside.
He knows, he loves, he cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.*

*He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.
Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skilful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern he has planned*



Towards the end of her life, Lady Ryder struggled with this, but I note, according to those close to her, that she found solace as she saw it as partaking in the sufferings of Christ Himself. Her work was done now, and the results were placed in the hands of God.

Occasionally we too are helped to see in this life the mystery of God's working, albeit 'through a glass darkly', by accepting his providence in everything, even in the bad things. In the story of Genesis, Joseph was one such 'seer'. Having experienced the worst kind of hurt, that which comes from those closest to us, he was able to look back, and in one magnanimous moment summarise God's gracious dealings... 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children. And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them'.

*Trust in the Lord with all
your heart, and lean not on
your own understanding.
Proverbs 3.5*

Prayer

Dear Lord, sometimes I just see the messy side of life, and find it hard to understand. But you have taught me not to go by human understanding. Instead, you have shown me that your thoughts are always higher than mine, and that I will never completely 'see' and understand everything in this life. Help me instead to rest myself in your great love, so clearly shown to me in your Son.

Day 23

Benedict

Devotional Reading: Acts 2.42-47

They devoted themselves to the fellowship

Lady Ryder's thoughts were turning toward the future. How would the work be continued after she had gone? *'My great dream before I 'go out' is to form a nucleus, a Congregation who will pray, be a powerhouse of prayer for the work of the Foundation. Others would join them in so far as they are able. This is what I am praying and hoping will happen... I felt for a long time that this would mean the formation of an Association or Community which would become the core or Centre of the Foundation's life. It would be a spiritual centre and power-house of prayer for the work, and some of its members would go forth into the field to sow and to reap the harvest, to serve the sick and those in need'.*

So the seeds of a religious community were sown. The immediate intention was that some of the members of the Prayer Fellowship would live as a dispersed community linked by prayer and meeting regularly to share their spiritual life and grow together. Sue Ryder said *'I also hope and pray that others will join Sister Josephine, a Benedictine nun, who is living at the Foundation's Retreat House in Walsingham'.* Dame Josephine had joined the community at Walsingham in the summer of 1991 as 'prayer mother'. Her daily duties included constant prayer for the work of the whole international

Without a vision
the people perish.
Proverbs 29:18

Foundation, as well as practical duties. As Lady Ryder's spiritual companion for a number of years, Dame Josephine became an important influence. Indeed, at an earlier point in her life Lady Ryder had thought of entering a religious community herself.



Benedict is a great figure in the history of Western Europe, and his life and writings give us a sure guide for a practical spiritual life. His rules for monks in the sixth century are relevant and applicable today, because they correspond to the actual make-up of human beings... spirit, mind and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23), expressed in prayer, learning and work.

Prayer: This aligns the human spirit to God's Spirit and therefore helps to accomplish God's will in the world. For Benedict this was liturgical prayer. But he encouraged his monks to go into the chapel at any time of day, and to have an informal relationship with God.

Learning: When Saint Benedict established 'reading' as one of the three aspects of Benedictine life he meant *lectio divina* (*divine reading*) which is the prayerful and meditative study of Scripture. But it included other reading too, so that the student was equipped for life in general.

Work: Benedict put his monks to work in gainful labour for a practical reason: they had to eat. Work, however, benefits man not only physically and materially. It benefits man because with a positive work ethic he co-operates with God in the redemption of the world.

Religious Orders like this provide a pattern for Christian living, community and service. It has stood the test of time, and offers a useful model for us today.

Prayer

Lord, we secretly long for a life that more completely expresses the way you have made us – spirit, mind and body – to be totally fulfilled. Grant us a community life that matches your intentions for us, that we may become a light for others. Amen

Day 24

Powerhouse of Prayer

Devotional Reading: Matthew 6.5-15

This, then, is how you should pray

Reflecting on her many years of practical service in the Foundation, Lady Ryder saw clearly that prayer was going to be key to its future success. *'I have been greatly encouraged by the formation and growth of the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship... It is a fellowship of prayer and that must be the strength of the Foundation in the future. I always return from these gatherings greatly renewed and encouraged... It is my prayer, and most fervent wish, that the*

I have so much to do that I shall

spend the first three hours in

prayer. Martin Luther

Prayer fellowship and the community will be at the centre of the Foundation, which is, and was, founded on faith'.

In my Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship membership card, I read that 'As members of this Fellowship, we are committed each day to pray the Lord's Prayer, uniting us all with Him'. There then follows a helpful devotional reflection on each part of the Prayer...

Our Father: In our fellowship of prayer with our Founder, whoever we are, whatever we contribute, patients, residents, volunteers, staff, executive committees or council members, we are united in the love of God the Father – in one joy, happiness and humour of his presence.

Who is in Heaven: God in heaven comes to share his divinity with us, making his home in us as we learn to obey his commandment of love.

Hallowed be your name: We are silent before this great mystery of the holiness of God, in whose name we go forward

Your kingdom come: Together, by grace, we hope to establish the kingdom in ourselves, in our homes, our communities, in our work, in the world, by prayer and perseverance.

Your will be done: Jesus prayed in anguish that he would do the Father's will. As God's children we too pray that we will do the Father's will.

On earth as it is in heaven: We pray and trust and hope for this transformation, asking for discernment and wisdom, to see where we may be limiting God's power in ourselves, in our Foundation.

Give us this day our daily bread: We, who have all that we need, are called by our vocation, to learn each day afresh, to share what we have, spiritually and materially with others.

Forgive us our sins: As we fail, we humbly call upon God's mercy, through His redeeming Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit of love, for forgiveness.

As we forgive those who sin against us: And in return we must give to others the fullness of God's forgiveness of us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: In the power of God the Father's mercy, overcome evil with good.

It is very reassuring that at the centre of the Prayer Fellowship, we follow a model of prayer that Jesus Himself taught us. There is strength in this.

Prayer

Lord, teach us to pray



Day 25

Praying with Ink

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 1.3-7

My heart is stirred by a noble theme, as I recite my verses to the king

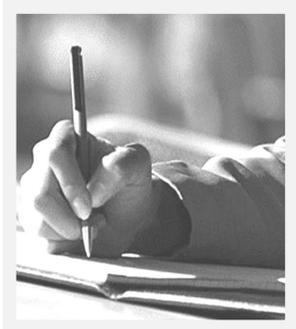
Prayer was the centre of all Sue Ryder's work. It brought her into the very presence of God. What kind of prayers did she like? Well, there is a selection scattered about in her writings, drawn from a rich heritage of Christian spirituality. Some of them have already been included in these devotions. But most interesting to me is that she wrote some herself.

Sometimes it is difficult to find the exact words to say, words that carry our spirits to God. We flick through pages and pages of prayer books and booklets hoping to find the exact words that will fit our sentiments, but none of the words seem to ring true. Exasperated, we are left without the means to express our hearts. The only way to unburden ourselves is to say them or write them ourselves. And this of course, is what happens.

Lady Ryder and her dear husband Leonard Cheshire left us examples of their own prayers, and we can use them today. But why not go further and follow their lead: become writers of prayers ourselves! You never know, our prayers may then enable others to find the comfort that we ourselves found in God.

Quite near to where I work is the home of 'The Prayer Trust'. I sometimes order their booklets for our patients at the Hospice. And how beautiful and helpful they are. Just like the Psalms they express the whole range of human experience and bring us safely into God's love. Here is how their website describes what they are trying to do...

'The Prayer Trust was started in 2000 under the leadership of Father Pat Sayles. Having spent years in Peru as a Columban Father, Fr. Pat is aware of the uplifting power of prayer across the world... One simple prayer can be the turning point in someone's life, the key that unlocks the treasures of God's love! Our hope is that those who use these little books will want to share them with others - with friends and relatives, with neighbours and colleagues, with those who might be ill or suffering, or those who feel far away from the Lord's love.



Our prayers must mean something to us if they are to mean anything to God. Maltbie D. Babcock

The Trust is a non-profit making charity and only seeks to recover the cost of publishing in order to produce new materials for sharing. We have established a network of friends who share this vision. They share the vision by literally sharing the booklets with others! By requesting some of our books you become part of this work, helping to make it possible to achieve The Prayer Trust's aim - to share prayer everywhere!

What a lovely vision. Let us follow it, and allow the Spirit to help us express our feelings towards God. Let us write our prayers in a small notebook, for ourselves and for others to use in our groups. We may be surprised at what an encouragement they can be. Here is an example from Paul the apostle...

Prayer

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Day 26

Open Our Ears Lord

Devotional Reading John 16.5-15

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Lady Ryder attended Benenden School. A teacher wrote to her years later... 'My memory of you as a schoolgirl is very clear, as if caught by a snapshot. You were standing quite alone in the courtyard, a small, still figure, fair-haired. I watched for a few minutes and wondered what you were thinking about. In a school community it is rather rare for people to wish to be alone, and I always hoped that I should know something of their future; these people who were friendly and enjoyed life but yet felt the need sometimes for the pleasure of solitude'. Later, whether driving through the night or during God's quiet hours at Cavendish, she would cherish solitude as a means of simply being in the presence of God. She was a natural contemplative.

It has been noted by many that prayer is a conversation, and not a monologue, and that God speaks today just as He always has done. His words quicken our spirits, flickering suddenly as a light in our soul. In just one moment of clarity we know he has said something that comes from beyond us, and it is for us then to go and unpack it. This of course is a mystical experience, a feeling to be learned, but one that is not as uncommon as church history would have us believe. Early on Jesus reassured his followers that He was going to send the Holy Spirit, who would take the initiative in continuing His ministry in all its forms, including teaching and leading His people. So what does God's voice sound like?

Prayer is not asking.
Prayer is putting oneself
in the hands of God, at
His disposition, and
listening to his voice in
the depth of our hearts.
Mother Teresa

Mark Virkler of 'Communion with God' helps us out... 'Elijah described it as a still, small voice (I Kings 19:12). I had always listened for an inner audible voice, and surely God can and does speak that way at times. However,

I have found that for most of us, most of the time, God's inner voice comes to us as spontaneous thoughts, visions, feelings, or impressions. For example, haven't each of us had the experience of driving down the road and having a thought come to us to pray for a certain person? We generally acknowledge this to be the voice of God calling us to pray for that individual. My question to you is, "What did God's voice sound like as you drove in your car? Was it an inner, audible voice, or was it a spontaneous thought that lit upon your mind?" Most of you would say that God's voice came to you as a spontaneous thought. So I thought to myself, "Maybe when I listen for God's voice, I should be listening for a flow of spontaneous thoughts. Maybe spirit-level communication is received as spontaneous thoughts, impressions, feelings, and visions." Through experimentation and feedback from thousands of others, I am now convinced that this is so'.

As part of morning prayer, Sue Ryder spent ten minutes each day in listening silence, so that the voice of God could be heard.

Prayer

*Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch him, and say that we love him
Open our ears Lord and help us to listen
Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus*



Day 27

The Harmony of Heaven

Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 16.14-23

You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Whether a guest on Desert Island Discs, listening to the radio on her lonely drives across Europe, or on reflective Sunday evenings at Cavendish with 100 Best Tunes, Sue Ryder loved to relax with beautiful music. And going further back, while quite young, she had played the organ at her church in Thurlow. Our faith has had a long association with music and worship. It is woven into our history. The first musician, Jubal, makes his appearance as early as Genesis 4, where we are told that 'he was the father of all who play the harp and flute' (v.21).

Music acts like a magic key, to which the most tightly closed heart opens. Maria von Trapp

As we turn the pages, we find many who followed in Jubal's musical footsteps. Moses sang a song of praise after the Exodus; Deborah sang after the victory over Sisera; King David played the lyre, and wrote many of the Psalms; the Lord Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples at the last supper; Paul and Silas sang a hymn of praise to God in jail; and the book of Revelation tells us that there is plenty of singing in heaven as a heavenly choir joins in praise to God.

Music creates a taste of heaven right now. So there are frequent exhortations to us to sing. For example: 'Come let us sing for joy to the Lord' (Ps. 95:1), 'Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvellous things' (Ps. 98:1), 'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord' (Eph. 5:19).

For Lady Ryder, listening to music was more than the simple appreciation of pleasant sounds. As she recalled her early introduction to the classics in her school years: *'It was at this time that I gradually became aware of the profound, inexplicable delight of classical music and discovered the mystical experience it could bring'*. Music wasn't an end in itself, but a way to experience God.

When we look back at musicians like David and the many Psalms he composed in the quiet hillsides, timeless spiritual themes tripped into his mind, and accompanied by lyre, he sang them out... 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want'. When the evil Saul had lost all sense of God's closeness, he would go into a rage, much to the consternation of his servants. So they set about doing what they could. They searched for someone who could play the lyre well in a desperate attempt to calm him down. David was chosen. When he played 'relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him'. Amazing!

There are times when all of us feel spiritually dry, even distressed. When these times come, think of the gift of music we have been given. Use some gentle piece that you particularly like. Let it help you move away from chaotic thinking, to quieten you and carry your spirit into God's presence. Stay there a while. Be healed.

Prayer

Dear Lord, who made us so that we sing to you better with music, awaken us to this beautiful gift, and when we feel far from you, may it bring us close to you again.



Day 28

Divine Reading

Devotional Reading Luke 8.4-15

They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

When Saint Benedict established "reading" as one of the aspects of Benedictine life he meant *lectio divina*, which is the prayerful and meditative study of sacred Scripture. No doubt Sue Ryder, who spent so much time alongside her friend Dame Josephine, would have come across the art of reading the Bible in this way.

Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. St. Jerome

To grasp what it involves, I have found the guidance of Pope Benedict XVI very helpful, who said 'if it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime'. So let us have a closer look.

We begin of course by calling on the Holy Spirit, asking for his assistance. Then we proceed to read and to meditate the Sacred Text in five movements (originally four, but traditionally added to for completeness)...

Lectio: It opens with the reading of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas.

Meditatio: Next comes meditation, which asks: what does the biblical text say to us? Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the community, must let himself or herself be moved and challenged.

Oratio: Following this, comes prayer, which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.

Contemplatio: Next comes contemplation, during which we take up God's own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us?

Actio: The process of *Lectio Divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action, which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity... Mary is a model of docile acceptance of God's word, for she 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart'.

Some of Lady Ryder's favourite scriptures were: Philippians 4.4-9, about finding peace through prayer; Psalm 27, which shows us our dependence on God in all things, and especially for courage; 1 Corinthians 4.16-18, which helps us to persevere through difficult times. Why not choose one, and use the method prescribed above?

Let us all enjoy a 'new spiritual springtime'.



Prayer

Lord, thank you for the scriptures which you inspired by your Holy Spirit. As you inspired the original writers, inspire us as we read their words today. So prepare the soil of all our hearts, that we may receive the seed of this divine word, and grow the abundant fruits of character that you look for in us... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, a harvest that will bring pleasure to Your heart.

Day 29

In God's School

Devotional Reading: Chronicles 1.7-13

Give me wisdom and knowledge

We grow and develop more quickly when we balance our spiritual study with a rigorous general education. So in addition to *lectio divina*, Benedictine's have developed a tradition of scholarly research and study. Benedict's desire for them to read along with praying and working meant reading books: lots of them! To be educated was an essential part of being equipped for a productive life.

'Change is the
end result of all
true learning'
Leo Buscaglia

Benenden School has been one of the leading boarding schools in Britain for over ninety years. When, in 1923, three school mistresses founded the School, they set high educational standards and wanted it to be a 'happy school with personal integrity and service to others always in mind, where everybody would be given the chance to follow her own bent.' It has remained true to that vision ever since.

Not always a happy pupil in other schools, Sue Ryder eventually found her 'sweet spot' here, in a school that shared her own values, and where she learned to enjoy discovering something of what she was born to become.

Along the way she grew in her appreciation of great prose and poetry. Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley, Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell, Wilfred Owen (a favourite), Geoffrey Dearmer and others. Wartime coloured these literary offerings of course, and it became the subject of many other writers and their books. Their vision of a better and more contented society inspired her. They were subsequently read, digested and later quoted liberally throughout her own biographical accounts.

Knowledgeable and practical, Sue Ryder was recruited to the elite Special Operations Executive, in particular to help the Polish wartime resistance movement. Eventually she was able to turn those same hands to most things, especially nursing, and later to the huge managerial demands of a worldwide Foundation for the relief of suffering.

Education inspires us, enables us to work and serve the needs of others and to make our communities better places to live. It is enshrined in the values of the Prayer Fellowship, and is today finding practical expression in the wonderful Lady Ryder Memorial Garden project. This provides educational and therapeutic opportunities in gardening for disabled or homeless young people. Horticultural qualifications up to Diploma Level can be gained, and perhaps most importantly, a new hope for the future.

On reflection, what could be more fitting than the occupation given to us at the very beginning of life's story... 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2.15).

Prayer

*Almighty and everlasting God,
You made the universe with all its marvellous order,
its atoms, worlds, and galaxies,
and the infinite complexity of living creatures:
Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation,
we may come to know you more truly,
and more surely fulfil our own special role in your world;
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*



Day 30

Work

Devotional Reading: James 2.14-24

I will show you my faith by what I do

According to the Benedictine way, we were given a spirit to pray, a mind to think, and a body to work. Therefore, if we are to fulfil being the person God intended us to be, to live a completed life, there has to be a balance of all three. So far we have looked at prayer and study as the first two occupations of the complete life. Now we look at the last, but not least... the world of physical work.

Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.. Saint Augustine

There can be no doubt in our minds that Sue Ryder was a hard worker, who had no respect for the hours of labour that most of us adhere to! For example, there were the long gruelling journeys across Europe to bring relief supplies, or to organise distant building programmes, revealing a very capable and practical side to her life. *'On these journeys I have on occasions had to try and cope with various mechanical problems... In 1952 I also worked briefly at Rootes, a well-known service centre in London, to gain more knowledge and to refresh my memory of the maintenance of vehicles... We were attired in boiler suits and carried a tool box. On admittance each vehicle received a job card which had to be followed... the chargehand was very strict'.*

Benedict understood that we are dignified through our work. Through work, we create things, and when we create things we are co-operating with God the Creator. When we co-create with God the Creator, we are exercising part of the God-like image in which we were made. Also, work also helps to incarnate the spiritual realities of the praying monk. When he works in the kitchen or in the fields; when he teaches in school or works in a hospital; when he works in a factory or shop, the monk applies the graces obtained through prayer to the real, physical world. The Benedictine life is not an otherworldly, totally spiritual existence. Instead, every aspect of it is constructed to bring the spiritual world and the everyday world together in a dynamic harmony.

If I had my way, I would be happy with a life of prayer and study. But I know that would be unbalanced and unhealthy. No, God has given me a body designed for plenty of physical output. I was made to work.

Sadly, if I don't work, ideas will just remain ideas. Thomas Edison was a famous American inventor who, singly or jointly, held a world record 1,093 patents, including the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and the long-lasting electric light bulb, devices that changed our world for ever. But he said: *'success is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration'.*

What inspiration has God planted in your heart that just requires your 'perspiration' make it a reality?

Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.*
Reinhold Niebuhr



Day 31 May Your Footsteps Guide Us

Devotional Reading Genesis 12.1-5
They left everything and followed Him

Sue Ryder was aware of the enormous task that lay ahead, and must at times have felt quite daunted. It may have been in those moments that she found comfort in the thought which she passes on to us... 'I ask you to remember that every journey begins with a single step'. One such moment was way back in 1939, in some sense the beginning of an amazing journey that she could never have imagined.

The congregation at Great Thurlow was in church as usual at eleven o'clock on Sunday 3 September 1939, and there on a portable radio we heard Neville Chamberlain's announcement that Britain was at war with Germany.' The months that followed were very unsettling for everyone. But the comforting words of King George as he spoke to the nation at Christmas of that year, must have helped bring some perspective to those, like Sue Ryder, who were trying to visualize their uncertain future... 'I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'" Not knowing the future, Sue learned the gift of living one day at a time and taking one step at a time, with the light for each day that God gave.

One dark night a very small boy was given a lantern by his father, who asked him to go out to the woodshed and bring to the house an armful of wood. The boy said, "Daddy, I can't see." The father then queried, "How far can you see?"

"Only three steps."

"Take them," said his father. "How far can you see now, son?"

"Three more steps."

Finally, by going forward three steps at a time, the boy reached the woodshed and brought in the wood.

We are given enough light to take the first steps, and we will do so, with God helping us. They may be awkward faltering steps at times, and we won't always know what shape our own 'war' on suffering will take. But though we don't know exactly what our future may hold, we do know who holds the future. And that will be enough.

Prayer

In all our travelling, may your footsteps guide us

In our journeying to work and returning, may your footsteps guide us

Within our homes and families, may your footsteps guide us

In our leisure time together, may your footsteps guide us

In difficult situations and conflict, may your footsteps guide us

As we stumble on the way, may your footsteps guide us

In the travelling of our faith, may your footsteps guide us

As we place our trust in you, may your footsteps guide us

In all our travelling Lord, may it be your footsteps in which we place our feet



The Sue Ryder Foundation Charter

The Sue Ryder Foundation is a Living memorial to all those millions who gave their lives during two World Wars in defence of human values, and to the countless others who are suffering and dying today as a result of persecution.

Whatever you do and wherever you pray, think about their supreme sacrifice.

This is an International Foundation which is devoted to the relief of suffering on the widest scale. It seeks to render personal service to those in need and to give affection to those who are unloved, regardless of age, race or creed, as part for the Family of man.

The work is a summons to seek out and face the reality of human suffering and to do something about it. It is a call to deny ourselves, and to give ourselves to those who have need of us, wherever they may be.

It is a challenge to us all:

*For the cause that lacks assistance,
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the future in the distance,
And the good that I can do.*

George Linnaeus Banks

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ST. KATHARINE'S, PARMOOR

Sue Ryder's Retreat House



This historic house stands in 12 acres of grounds in an area of great scenic beauty and abundant wildlife. The rural tranquillity of the Chilterns, combined with a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere, make St. Katharine's an ideal destination for groups and individuals, for both residential or day visits. It is run by the Sue Ryder Prayer Fellowship, an independent registered charity whose aim is to provide a facility that is ecumenical, open to people of all faiths or of none.



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