

Aidan's Way Day 6:

Imitation of Christ

Thank you for joining me in prayer on this the sixth day of my three-week pilgrimage from the Scottish island of Iona to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, travelling 300 miles in the footsteps of the seventh century Celtic saint, Aidan, and praying the Bible each day in our usual way. Today I'm leaving St Conan's Way, the trail that's brought me this far from Iona, and joining the West Highland Way, here at the remote Bridge of Orchy.¹

(Want to know more about this unique series on pilgrimage? Check out the special introductory day, "An Introduction to Pilgrimage").

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly, to re-centre my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

High King of Heaven, would You walk with me and talk with me as I seek to follow in the footsteps of Your servant Aidan today? I have set my heart on pilgrimage, so challenge me and change me, cleanse and rearrange me, until the fire that burned in Aidan's heart, burns brightly in mine.

Rejoice and Reflect

Looking out at the wild landscape of these Western Highlands on another glorious sunny day, I choose to rejoice in God's goodness, joining with the ancient praise of all God's people in the words of Psalm 84:

The LORD God is our sun and our shield.
He gives us grace and glory.
The LORD will withhold no good thing
from those who do what is right.
O LORD of Heaven's Armies,
what joy for those who trust in you.

Psalm 84:11-12 (NLT)²

Pause and pray

As I walk, one of the books I'm reflecting on is *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis – 'perhaps the most widely-read Christian devotional after the Bible.'³ Books like these can distil the message of the Bible and bring us back to its truth with fresh eyes. Today, therefore, I'm practising *Lectio Divina* (literally 'holy reading'), not on a Bible passage but on this 700-year-old devotional classic,⁴ inviting the Holy Spirit to speak into my life and guide my prayers through the words of Thomas à Kempis...

The Imitation of Christ, Chapter 2: 'On Thinking Humbly of Oneself'

"If it seemeth to thee that thou knowest many things, and understandest them well, know also that there are many more things which thou knowest not. Be not high-minded, but rather confess thy ignorance. Why desirest thou to lift thyself above another, when there are found many more learned and more skilled in Scripture than thou? ... To account nothing of oneself, and to think always kindly and highly of others, this is great and perfect wisdom."⁵

These words challenge me to the core of my being in three specific ways: Firstly, to face the fact that I'm not nearly as clever as I like to make out: 'Be not high-minded,' says Thomas à Kempis, 'but rather confess thy ignorance.' Secondly, I'm challenged to be less competitive: 'Why desirest thou to lift thyself above another?' Thirdly, I am challenged to 'think kindly and highly of others' today.

Ask

Holy God, it's true that I often pretend to be more knowledgeable and more spiritual than I really am. Help me today to admit my mistakes. I confess my compulsion to compare myself with others, and my unhealthy drive to compete constantly, even in casual conversations. Help me today to humble myself in my dealings with other people. I admit how harsh and critical I can be, and the subtle ways I put people down whilst pretending to be nice. Help me today to believe the best and not the worst of everyone I meet.

Pause and pray

The world loves to hate narcissistic leaders, but barely knows how to name the truly humble ones. I pray now for a leader who models kindness, vulnerability, and the servant-heart of Jesus, that He may lift this person up in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to the passage I listen for a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit is highlighting to me personally today...

"If it seemeth to thee that thou knowest many things, and understandest them well, know also that there are many more things which thou knowest not. Be not high-minded, but rather confess thy ignorance. Why desirest thou to lift thyself above another, when there are found many more learnèd and more skilled in Scripture than thou? ... To account nothing of oneself, and to think always kindly and highly of others, this is great and perfect wisdom."

What word or phrase jumped out at me from this passage?

I am particularly struck by this challenge to 'account nothing of oneself' in order to 'think always kindly and highly of others'. Western culture teaches the exact opposite: that to be kinder to others I must be kinder to myself. Maslow's hierarchy of needs rates self-actualisation as the pinnacle for human fulfilment. But Thomas à Kempis, speaking from fifteenth-century Holland, is reminding me of an older, wiser gospel truth. Jesus says: 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself' (Luke 9:23). The Apostle Paul says: 'In humility consider others better than yourselves' (Phil. 2:3). And the Apostle Peter says: 'clothe yourselves with humility toward one another' (1 Peter 5:5). The way of Christ is not self-actualisation but a self-emptying that leads to fullness of life.

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

A prayer of relinquishment by Thomas à Kempis:

Grant me, O Lord, to know that which ought to be known; to love that which ought to be loved; to praise that which pleaseth Thee most... Suffer me not to judge according to the sight of bodily eyes, nor to give sentence according to the hearing of the ears of ignorant men; but to discern in true judgement between visible and spiritual things, and above all things to be ever seeking after the will of Thy good pleasure.

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me says to me in 1 Peter:

Be content with who you are, and don't put on airs. God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time.

1 Peter 5:6 (MSG)

Closing Prayer

***Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.***

***Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.***

***Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.***

Amen.

¹You can follow Pete's pilgrimage and hear the occasional song inspired by the journey on 'The Pilgrim Podcast' available at www.PeteGreig.info.

²During this season of pilgrimage, many of our 'Rejoice' Scriptures will be drawn from the so-called 'Pilgrim Psalms' (84, 120-134), prayed by God's people approaching Mount Zion on the three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

³Robert S. Miola, *Early Modern Catholicism: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p285.

⁴The aim of *Lectio Divina* is not just praying the Bible, but learning to apply the principles of 'holy reading' to non-canonical literature, and ultimately learning how to make the secular sacred by hearing God's voice and encountering His presence in all things. Please be assured that the Bible remains our primary source of revelation and authority, and we are in no way deviating or detracting from it!

⁵*The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis is freely available online in the public domain and in numerous printed editions.