

"TWO OLIVE TREES" (Zech. 4:3 & 11, Rev. 11:4) | November, 2006



Many years ago in England, I used to enjoy listening to a radio program which always began with the question Have you read any good books lately? It makes a good conversation opener, and often leads to some interesting and thought provoking discussion.

One book I have been reading and re-reading over the past year is *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John*, by Jean Vanier. It is an inspiring and challenging book, and has prompted me to take a fresh look at the gospel of John, and its implications in my daily life. As I read Jean Vanier's book, I was struck by the similarities between many of his words and those of Benedict. This should not surprise us, for although they are more than 1500 years apart, their writing and teaching are both founded on the gospel.

As Benedictine Oblates and monastics we are all familiar with the Rule of Benedict. And of course Jean Vanier is no stranger to the World Community. Among other things he will be remembered for the John Main Seminar he gave in the UK in 1992, as well as the Form Conversation he shared with Dr. Balfour Mount on Parliament Hill more recently.

The 'two olive trees' mentioned in Zechariah and Revelation are described as the 'two anointed ones' who witness before the Lord, and whose role is associated with prophecy as well as beauty. Traditionally the olive tree is a symbol of peace, wisdom, salvation, even among non-christian religions. According to an ancient legend the 'tree' on which Jesus died was said to have been made of olive wood. So the symbol of the 'two olive trees' may aptly be applied to Benedict and Jean, whose spiritual teaching has enriched many of us.

Both Benedict and Jean Vanier began new faith communities centred on Christ. Benedict introduced a new form of monastic life and Jean Vanier founded L'Arche. For both, their way

of life was seen within the context of community. In both communities the members are called to an intimate relationship with God, through their prayer and life together. For both Benedict and Jean, people really matter; each one is important and of value; and is a gift to the others, to be treasured, loved and treated with respect.

Here are a few random examples taken from Jean Vanier and Benedict. Expressed in a different way for different people at a different time and place, both reveal the same spirit of compassion and caring that Jesus taught all his followers.

Other disciples will be called to live with Jesus in community as Mary and Joseph did, to live the pains and joys of community life, to live community as a place of worship and prayer, a place of hospitality and welcome, especially for those who are weak and in need, a place of sharing and receiving the word of God, a place of celebration and growth towards forgiveness....J.V. p.46

We intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome...(Prol.) No one should be troubled or saddened in the household of God. (RB 31)

We are called to gradually grow in love...this journey, our pilgrimage, begins and deepens as we hear God murmur within our hearts: I love you, just as you are. (J.V. p.87)

Listen carefully to the Master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart....(RB. Prol.)The love of Christ must come before all else. (RB. 4)

(Jesus) wants them (disciples) to realize that their first calling will be towards those who are broken and rejected. For Jesus each person, whatever his or her abilities or disabilities is unique and important; each one is a child of God, loved by God. (J.V. p. 102)

Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ, for he said: 'I was sick and you visited me'...'as you did for one of these least brothers or sisters, you did for me' (Mt. 25, RB. 36)

When we judge or accuse people, is it not because we are unable to accept the truth of our own brokenness and to forgive ourselves? (J.V. p. 150)

Do not grumble or speak ill of others...harbor neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone, and do nothing out of envy. (RB. 4)

As we serve the hungry and the thirsty; as we visit the sick and those in prison, as we welcome strangers and clothe the naked, we become close to Jesus and let Jesus touch and awaken our hearts. (J.V. p. 218)

Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received. (RB. 53)

Jesus is showing a simple way to union with God, a way of compassion, love, service, and humility that is for all people: not just for the strong, the clever, the capable and the virtuous, but also for the weak and the humble. He will lead us little by little to a greater union with the Father. (J.V. p. 257)

You must relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick (Mt. 25)bury the dead. Go

to help the troubled, and console the sorrowing. (RB. 4)

I have come to see that to pray is above all to dwell in Jesus and to let Jesus dwell in me. It is not first and foremost to say prayers, but to live in the now of the present moment, in communion with Jesus.silence is the fruit of the presence of God; it is peace. (J.V.p. 358)

If anyone chooses to pray privately, let them simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and compunction of heart. (RB. 52) There are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence (RB. 6)

This is to mention but a few words from the writings of these 'two olive trees' - Jean Vanier and Benedict. May the Spirit lead each of us to discover even more as we continue our pilgrimage.

Oblates

Source URL: <http://www.wccm.org/content/two-olive-trees-zech-43-11-rev-114-november-2006>