

Thought for the Week

26th January 2020—3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

We are all called to love and serve God; the question we may ask ourselves is, exactly what does he call us to?

Today we see four men apparently abandoning family and livelihood in order to follow Jesus – no questions asked, at least in Matthew’s account. Whatever possessed them to respond with such generosity (or recklessness?) when they had no idea where they would be led by this charismatic figure?

We may find a clue in the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and the Venerable Mary Ward (1585–1645), for whom spiritual freedom is key. Ignatius teaches that in order to follow the Call, we need to be free from the things that may stand in our way of loving and serving God. Choosing to respond to the call to build the Kingdom is unlikely to be an easy option, as the Apostles and Ignatius, Mary and countless others would discover.

Some of Mary Ward’s retreat notes give us an insight into her meditation on the call of the Apostles: they were so graced with the gift of spiritual freedom that *‘their whole being was entirely at their Master’s disposal; without that attitude of freedom they would never have... had the means to serve him so faithfully’*. The gift of spiritual freedom is one that Ignatius suggests we pray for, even though that means praying not to cling to the things of this world – be they riches, reputation, health, a long life...

Mary Ward sensed (correctly, as it turned out) that her call to found a radically different religious order for women would bring her great trouble; nevertheless, in faith she prayed: *‘What pleaseth thee best, that do.’* She saw that *‘there was no help for me but to cling to him... for he was there to help me’*.

Mary’s total trust in God’s providence may help us when the going gets tough; today’s Psalm encapsulates perfectly her disposition at times of difficulty: ‘The Lord is my light and my help... Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.’

As the Holy Father has established this Sunday as the Sunday of the Word of God, perhaps we could honour that by spending time pondering today’s Gospel reading as Mary Ward did, and open ourselves in freedom, to see where it will take us.

Cecilia