

Reflection from the *'Little Book of Lent'* – an anthology composed by Reverend Canon Arthur Howells (2014, London: Harper Collins) comprising extracts from several of his favourite spiritual writers and reproduced here with his kind permission.

## 5. The Fourth Sunday in Lent

### *For Reflection*

*Brother Bernard (1928-2007) was an Anglican Franciscan in great demand as a spiritual director with a gift for teaching and preaching. In his book, Open to God, he interweaves the story of St Francis, his own personal story and the story of humanity, helping us to discover God in all things. Here he speaks of his own faith as a Franciscan friar.*

### Open to God

Tremulously I came to our Society hoping to bring my life together in God. I'm still working at it, or rather working hard to let go into what God is doing in me. People help me, both spiritual directors, religious Superiors, peers and the people in many places that I have been given the opportunity to serve. The daily disciplines of prayer – prayer so much more catered for and safeguarded than most people's – put me in the way of learning to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But I suppose that what gets in the way is the struggles within myself to trust, to put aside anxiety and worldly considerations, the 'free floating' anger, the desire to possess, the irrational sense of being 'hard done by' or of it 'not being fair'. It is the struggle with all these things so that I can be open to God, ready for His will and not dominated by the unresolved in myself or by the powers of evil – this makes up my daily life. And it's such a relief when I choose with God and it 'happens'!

Many people have much less choice about the big things in life that I have had: sheer survival, getting something for themselves and their families to eat occupies most of their attention. Out in our more affluent world, the struggle to find any job makes it a luxury to ask questions like 'Is it what I'm called to?'; I must take any job that 'brings in the bread' and helps a bit with the boredom and worthlessness feelings which marginalize and dispirit. In this world, how I get on with people at home and work and at the pub or club occupy most of my inner attention with little opportunity to discover that all these relationships are grounded in the One who loves us beyond our imagining. So I cannot but consider myself a very lucky person to have such a range of opportunities, variety of work and interest, the chance to go to other parts of the world and to cross many culture lines, to have deep intimacy in loving relationships with people of all ages and both sexes, and to have all this grounded in God who alone gives it purpose and life. Not always actually to feel lucky is just part of how we are, but deep down I am thankful.

I am glad I'm not God, having to deal in such delicacy with so many millions of people in so many settings – let alone counting the very hairs of their heads and knowing every sparrow that falls to the ground (Matthew 10:29-30; Luke 12:6-7). But I'm glad to know (and partly know) such a God and to have some little share in what He is all about. For I don't know much about what life would be for otherwise. And for those who can't name Him (yet) and only know Him through all the other things, I want to do all I can to put them in the way of being lucky too, for the best luck of all is to know God and have fellowship with Him.

OPEN TO GOD  
BROTHER BERNARD SSF

Scripture Reading  
Philippians 4:4-14

*'I have learned to be content with whatever I have.'*

Prayer

To you, dear Lord, all hearts are open;  
from you no secrets are hidden.

I stand in your presence  
know that you welcome me.

Fill me with joy that –  
you have made me and all the world –  
that I am a forgiven sinner –  
that you have room for me in your heart  
and that I am yours now and for ever.