

Prayer of the month • August 2012

Lord, isn't your creation wasteful?
Fruits never equal the seedlings' abundance.
Springs scatter water.
The sun gives out enormous light.
May your bounty teach me greatness of heart.
May your magnificence stop me from being mean.
Seeing you a prodigal and open-handed giver,
let me give unstintingly like a king's son, like God's own.



Dom Hélder Câmara, 1909-99

It is not possible to out-give God, but we can be like him. This prayer reflects on the gratuitousness of God in creation, even wastefulness, and the author, Dom Hélder Câmara, sees a challenge to his own attitude which he characterises as 'mean'. However, the imaginativeness of the prayer belies this, and we are left with a feeling of hope, even exhilaration in what is possible for one who wants to be generous like God.

Dom Hélder Câmara, whose life spanned most of the twentieth century, was one of the great prophetic voices of the church. Hélder Pessoa Câmara was born in north east Brazil on 7 February 1909, the twelfth of thirteen children. He expressed the desire to become a priest when only eight years old. He went to seminary at the age of fourteen, and was ordained priest at the age of 22. During the 1940s he was an organiser for Catholic Action, a group promoting Christian values among the burgeoning working class in Brazil. He was appointed bishop on 1952, at the age of 41, and became secretary to the Latin American bishops at Vatican II (1962-65), gathering together there a group of 86 bishops who became known as 'the church of the poor'. He spoke against the torture that was being carried out in Brazil after the military coup of 1964, and was subjected to assassination attempts. His campaigning on behalf of the poor was sometimes welcomed and sometimes criticised. Referring to this himself, he said: 'When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist'. After retirement at the age of 75, he continues to be active and campaigned for 'A Year 2000 without Poverty', though he suffered from memory loss for the last five years of his life. He died on 27 August 1999, at Recife, aged 90.

Colin Lunt