

## Prayer of the month • May 2015

Lord, I want to love you, yet I'm not sure.  
I want to trust you, yet I'm afraid of being taken in.  
I know I need you, yet I'm ashamed of the need.  
I want to pray, yet I'm afraid of being a hypocrite.  
I need my independence, yet I fear to be alone.  
I want to belong, yet I must be myself.  
Take me, Lord, yet leave me alone.  
Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.  
O Lord, if you are there, you do understand, don't you?  
Give me what I need but leave me free to choose.  
Help me work it out my own way, but don't let me go.  
Let me understand myself, but don't let me despair.  
Come unto me, O Lord...I want you there.  
Lighten my darkness...but don't dazzle me.  
Help me to see what I need to do and give me strength to do it.  
O Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.

Bernard, SSF, 1928-2007

There's a very honest hesitancy about this prayer – a recognition of the difference between what God wants and what I want, between my understanding of myself and God's understanding of me. We can't deal with uncertainty simply by the polar opposites of belief and unbelief. Invoking God is inviting change in our lives, but we are cautious about how much change we can cope with. Br Bernard's prayer recognises a sense of purpose, of vocation we might call it, and asks for God's help in finding it.

Bernard was born in Birmingham in 1928, and baptized as Michael John Apps. His father was a businessman and later Lord Mayor. At school during wartime, he later did military service before, at the age of 21, studying history and theology at Pembroke College, Cambridge. He was president of the Student Christian Movement, and met Fr Algy and the Anglican Franciscans. He decided to join them in 1953. He almost decided to leave at one point, but thought he would give the religious life 'one more go' at Plaistow, East London, where over the next ten years, he was variously youth leader, parish priest, head of the house, operative in a pickle factory, part-time community psychiatric social worker, confessor and spiritual guide, mission preacher, SSF visitor to Oxford each term and Assistant Provincial Minister SSF. In 1969 he went to work in Australia, before returning to England, first to Canterbury, and then to become Guardian of Hilfield Friary. In 1986 he wrote a small book, 'Open to God', in which he acknowledged what Francis, the Franciscan movement and the Society of Saint Francis meant to him. He was a remarkable spiritual guide, and had great insight. He said, 'it's very easy for all of us to think one thing, feel another, say another and do yet another.' He knew that continuing transformation was needed for us to become like Christ. He died on 17 May 2007.

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