

## Friday of Lent Week 1



As we can see from the story of Martha and Mary in Luke's gospel, stress is not a modern phenomenon. It is inherent in the human psyche that at times we feel we can't cope. Life gets too much, we feel isolated and desperate.

Stress of course is relative. One person's stress is another person's fun. Perhaps because of the adrenalin rush or the natural need to surpass our limitations, a sportsman or a businesswoman enjoy putting themselves in stressful situations. Others seek an uneventful life and settle for comfort within their known capacities.

Eu-stress is different from di-stress. Creativity rarely flows without a degree of stress. Too much of it, however, stifles the spirit. It is not only a matter of temperament. The inner strength of the psyche ebbs and flows and what we can handle one day seems to overwhelm us the next.

The necessary element, often missing when life gets too fast and furious, is good judgment and self-awareness. "May I know myself so that I may know thee," was St Augustine's prayer? a rather stressed out saint and administrator, it seems from his relentless writing. We all need to know when stress is reaching the red zone, when we need to turn to others for support, when we need to stop.

Where does this self-knowledge and self-control come from? Blood pressure and other measurable indicators can help. Techniques and programs might be useful. But self-knowledge arises from an intuitive level of consciousness. Everyone has it, but not all have opened their access to it. The paradox is that the spontaneous and natural wisdom that allows us to adjust our performance to ever-shifting interior and external forces is the fruit of discipline. So much of modern lifestyle causes bad stress. So little of our cultural or personal habits are disciplined.

As long as we think of meditation primarily as a technique for stress-reduction we get limited results. Deeper and bigger change comes when we understand it is a discipline.

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