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Saturday Lent, Week 1

Treachery and brutality in Libya. A massacre of innocent people praying in Yemen. A Job-like sequence of natural disasters and immense loss in Japan. It is hard at times to believe in the inherent goodness of human nature or the benevolence of nature. Yet the response to suffering and violence is what counts. And how people take action in these moments illuminates the truth that always lies deeper than appearances and first reactions.

One of the qualities which shows that the human being is capable of rising above disasters and disappointments is the capacity for self-restraint and self-sacrifice. When this capacity is lost humanity suffers a loss of identity, a regression into something dark and depressing that terrifies us if we cannot integrate and transcendence it.

Religion is often condemned today for its negativity and narrow-mindedness. And, as in art or business, you can find good and bad practices and outcomes in religion too. Christianity is often caricatured as a religion of repression and wagging fingers opposed to pleasure. Yet, as this season tries to remind us, the art of happiness rests on our capacity for moderation and compassion. We cannot find fulfillment at the expense of others or by clinging to our own security while failing to meet the needs of others. There is a time for celebration and following one's instincts but this is always balanced by the time for discipline and patience.

Nothing shows us this more clearly and intimately – and prepares us for applying it consistently in daily life - than the practice of meditation.Laurence Freeman OSB

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