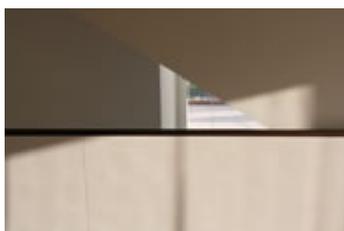


Tuesday Lent, Week 4



A **virtuous and zealous** young monk once gave in to temptation (we're not told how) and promptly fell into despondency. Before long he had given up all his spiritual practice and spent his days lazing around feeling more and more of a failure and reject.

He went to see a teacher who recognised the problem and told him just to start turning his life around. Climb back on the wagon. Like weeding an overgrown garden, though, it seemed to the young monk – as it can often seem to any of us – too big a job ever to complete. Just start, he was advised. Little by little. Day by day. And one day you'll be back where you were but wiser than when you fell into temptation. So he started.

This commitment to regular practice and to starting again and again doesn't look heroic or dramatic. Maybe Lucifer chose to rebel because he felt it was more dramatic to be a fallen angel in an illusory world than to be just one of the zillions of good angels standing in ranks singing God's praises in the real one. Doing it little by little and day by day is what all growth is about –there are no spiritual steroids to speed up the process that don't also undermine it. But it's not as dull as it sounds. As the illusions peel away reality shines out with a glory that transforms our perception. As the ego diminishes we judge by real standards not unsustainable ones. These forty days are all about seeing how we can re-commit to the day-by-day process but at a deeper level, where the light is already stronger than before.

'God does not expect us to succeed', the old rabbi reminds us, 'but we are not allowed to give up.' Or, if you prefer a nursery room riddle: Q: How do you eat an elephant? A: A little bit each day.

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