The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Weekly Readings 4/9/2011

An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, ?Dearest Friends? in Christian Meditation Newsletter, Vol. 35, No. 2, July 2011, P. 5.

We are all looking for something. Some have a clear sense of it, at least a conscious awareness of something missing.

But much of the time and for most of us, it remains a dull ache and a vague longing that endures through good and hard times alike. ?My soul is restless, till it rests in you,? was St. Augustine?s expression of this longing for wholeness, for the resurrection that transcends the birth and death cycle of desire. Seen in this way this longing is a gift, not an affliction because, when seen and recognized, it is the turning of a spiritual corner. Today in a culture conditioned by consumerism from the earliest age, this understanding of desire should be at the heart of all religious education.

Bookshops are full of the latest advice on self-help. The bestsellers use lists like good boundaries, handling self-criticism, expressing your feelings, developing balance, asserting yourself, eating well and doing exercise. The best list I know is found in a book that doesn?t top the charts but has not been out of print for 1500 years. In St Benedict?s Rule, the fourth chapter is on the Tools of Good Works, seventy-five short statements which he describes as the ?tools of the spiritual craft? that, when seriously applied, lead to the transcendent realization of the promises of Christ: ?what eye has not seen, nor the ear heard what God has prepared for those who love him.?

The Tools begin with the Ten Commandments because the moral life is the foundation of the contemplative path. Next come the corporal works of mercy, the minimum effort we are expected to make for the well-being of others. Then the guarding of the heart against thoughts of anger, revenge or deception. As he lived in community, he understood how important it is to practice love of enemies and how self-control in speech as well as in our ordinary physical habits facilitates this basic Christian practice. Conscious mindfulness is assisted by keeping death always before your eyes and promotes a deeper level of peace and joy. The temptation of spiritual egoism are also recognized and offset in Benedict?s injunction always to yearn for the fullness of life.

These tools of good works are also the means of caring for oneself. Every form of caring is an energy of faith: it takes the attention off one?s individual wants and feelings and transfers it to a higher good. It is therefore a way of transcendence. It extends over time, which tests its sincerity and authenticity. It is therefore a way of transformation because we are changed by persevering in an act of faith.

All Benedict?s tools, and caring itself, are designed to release our capacity for love. Saying the mantra unifies these many forms of caring. . . .It concentrates them in the nexus of the heart where the love of God. . .enters. . . .

After Meditation, Robert Morgan, ?Great Day in the Morning,? from Terroir (Penguin Poets, 2011), cited in The Writer?s Almanac, August 29, 2011.

My father, when he was surprised
or suddenly impressed, would blurt
Great Day in the morning,? as though
a revelation had struck him.
The figure of his speech would seem
to claim some large event appeared
at hand, if not already here;
a mighty day or luminous age
was flinging wide its doors as world
on world revealed their wonders in
the rapturous morning, always new,
beginning as the now took hold.

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