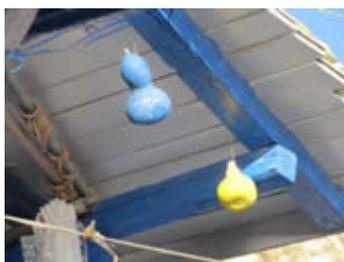


Weekly Teachings 23/9/2012



Humility

The world, in which we live, does not value the virtue of humility. On the contrary it is self-assertion, overt self-confidence, material success, fame and esteem in the eyes of others that is coveted. We even equate humility with humiliation.

And who likes to be humiliated?

But to the Desert Fathers and Mothers humility was never humiliation; it was an essential way of being. St Benedict too considers humility as one of the main virtues. His account is very much within the context of living in a Monastery, but is still relevant to our time. He describes the steps towards humility as a ladder with twelve rungs. The first two are the foundation of acquiring the virtue of humility: 'The first step of humility, then, is that we keep 'The reverence of God always before our eyes' and never forget it.' We reverence God in Nature and the Cosmos that surrounds us, we intuit the Invisible in the visible manifestation, and respect the Divine presence in those we meet.

This attitude of awe and reverence leads us to knowing our need of God and to the second step in humility on St Benedict's ladder - to let go of an ego-centric approach to life. Our guiding rule is to be 'Not my will be done, but thine be done.' (Luke 22:42), not thinking of our own benefit and feelings but instead of the need of others: 'Happy is the monk who views the welfare and progress of all men with as much joy as if it were his own (Evagrius)

The following steps on the ladder stress the importance of obedience ' deep listening, which we have looked at earlier in these letters.

The ninth step on the ladder is 'that we control our tongues and remain silent; not speaking unless asked a question.' In other words we are asked to listen to others rather than demand the right to be heard. It again deals with our self-centred pride and our strong attachment to the truth of our own opinions. This part of the virtue of humility was quite challenging, even for Evagrius. There is a story about him, when he first arrived in the desert. He asked (probably

Macarius the Great) the following: "Tell me some piece of advice by which I might be able to save my soul." This was the usual way one addressed an elder monk. The Desert hermits would teach those who came to them with few words but these were to the point; they intuitively knew what the other person needed to hear. The story carries on as follows: "The old man answered him: "If you wish to save your soul do not speak before you are asked a question." Now this bit of advice was very disturbing to Evagrius and he displayed some annoyance at having asked for a thought: "Indeed, I have read many books and I cannot accept instructions of this kind." It is easy to see that Evagrius still had some work to do on his pride! The story continues ironically: "Having derived much profit from his visit he left the old man."

We do need these steps on the ladder of humility for the practice of meditation. We need to keep our mind on the Presence of God and leave our self-centred ideas of achievement and pride behind. In all humility, knowing our need of God, we trustingly persevere in our practice. The peace of God which passes all understanding is a gift and not an achievement to be proud of. That is why each day we need to start again in true humility, in faith and hope. John Main and Laurence Freeman remind us of this necessity by stressing that we are all beginners, however long we have been on the path.

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For further help with setting up and leading groups, please look [HERE](#).

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