

Monday Lent, Week 2



Mondays inspire different feelings in people: anticipation and excitement in returning to a work you love and believe in and the desire to learn from new experience. Or dread and boredom because you can't believe in the value of what you do just to earn enough to live. Today, too, in a time of high unemployment, many suffer from the empty fear of meaninglessness that can invade the minds of those who do not have the dignity of work.

“And, what do you do?” It's a common question when you meet someone new and feel impatient to categorise them. Their job – or even lack of one – and their attitude to it quickly defines or labels them. Of course what we do with our time each day is important. Even more significant is how we do it – willingly as service or with bitterness as a kind of slavery. But there is another kind of work that we are all called to perform that determines the quality of our entire life.

To develop the right attitude towards our work – commitment and the wish to do a good job but not obsessive total identification with it – that is the secret. The balance of commitment and detachment which affects all our experience and relationships. I mean the inner work done without demanding a reward that we call meditation.

It is the work of attention – a word that carries the sense of ‘tending to’ ‘or taking care of’. The remuneration of this labour of love is compassion. Empathy for the victims of natural disasters, violence or injustice is one thing – often short lived and little more than pity. Compassion is another. It takes us beyond objectifying the other into experiencing something that is the beginning of divinity – inter-subjectivity. The strange and wonderful journey that we recommence this Monday morning means that the compassion and self-acceptance released by attention first bear fruit in our relationship with ourselves. Our work - during the remaining days of Lent during which we focus on this inner work - is raised to higher consciousness and joy because of this.

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