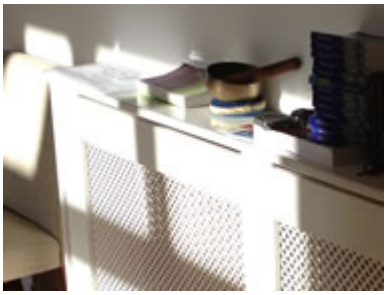
The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

Saturday after Ash Wednesday



The third kind of practice that both expresses and deepens meditation during Lent ? Giving.

True giving is a very rare achievement. Usually we give with invisible strings attached. We may be expecting something in return ? another gift, recognition, reward, gratitude ? or just enjoying the feeling that we are generous and nice people.

If we see we aren?t getting the reward we feel is our due we become hurt or resentful.

Jesus says that when we give we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. A tall order, to be so simple and unself-conscious. But it is essentially the same as coming to meditation while letting go of our demands and expectations, saying the mantra like a child. The desert teachers put it this way: the monk who knows that he is praying is not truly praying; the monk who does not know that he is praying is truly praying.

In such a self-conscious and self-evaluating psychological culture as ours it is hard to know what this means and even harder to trust it as wisdom. Doesn?t this conflict with the virtues of self-awareness and self-knowledge? But unless we learn to taste this wisdom ourselves (in Latin wisdom is sapientia, from the word sapere which means to taste) we stay locked into the self-fixation of the self-conscious giver who gives but can?t let go of the gift they are giving.

Every true act of giving is a vehicle for the gift of self. When we have felt this kind of gift we know it is not measured by the object given. Its effect is to transform us by awakening the capacity in turn to give ourselves. This giving is at the heart of the Easter mystery we are preparing to enter more deeply through Lent.

John Main once said that the best preparation for meditation is the habit of small acts of kindness. Giving to others, unsolicited and not asking for anything in return: maybe money or

things but also time. A smile and thank you to a tired bus driver or toilet cleaner. Such giving ? which the mantra trains us for ? brings golden light to a drab or depressed world.

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