

Tuesday Lent, Week 3



Pascal said that the heart has reasons that reason knows nothing of. In other words there are different kinds or levels of logic. The logic of the heart is pure Logos, the principle of order and harmony that the Greeks discovered long before St John claimed that it had 'become flesh'. But how can we live by it in all circumstances?

Even those who are not interested in these word games and who say they are not intellectually interested in these ideas nevertheless need logic, some way of rationalizing their behaviour. Hitler in his last will and testament shortly before he killed himself justified his madness and the destruction it had brought on the world with his own version of rational argument. No one does wrong without pretending that in some scheme of thought it is, in fact, right.

Say, for example, you had given up coffee for Lent. At some moment in the middle of the holy season there might seem a very good reason to drink coffee – to keep you awake, because you were having a hard time and you felt you deserved a break, because the smell was so delicious and others were having it and why resist a legitimate pleasure? Of course, if you resisted the temptation it would eventually fade and then you would feel pleased with yourself – even secretly self-righteous – that you had passed the test. You might then have fallen into the greater fault of spiritual pride. St Augustine warned those who kept chaste not to get proud because a proud virgin was worse than a repentant sinner.

Or you might have succumbed to the aroma and then felt bad about it, your self-esteem damaged and your spiritual will weakened. On the other hand it could have taught you humility and helped you make progress by neutralising the virus of perfectionism.

I am sorry to raise all this relativism. Isn't it better to know always what the rules are and how important it is to keep them? What's right and what's wrong isn't a matter of choice after all, is it?

If only it was that easy, even in Lent.

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