

## Wednesday Lent, Week 5



'**The heart** is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?' This insight from the prophet Jeremiah suggests a different, less comforting response to self-knowledge. The heart is usually defined as the place of spiritual knowledge and true discernment. It is the sacred central point of consciousness, a tabernacle of the divine presence. To know one's heart is to know God.

Yet the heart is very close to that other zone of the biblical self, the belly, where the turbulence of emotion and passion whip up like sudden storms. The forces of this aspect of our self easily cast a shadow over the heart and make it seem as if we have, at least temporarily, lost heart altogether. But it makes us insecure to confuse the belly and the heart in this way. Are we really so unstable, so unpredictable?

As long as we are on this journey we can never be complacent about any degree of composure or peace we think we have attained. The desert fathers warned us to be constantly vigilant and ready to be humbled by our own instability. That's why Lent has not been about perfectionism or gaining merit points. It is about humility, which is self-knowledge and which, in turn, means knowing there are areas of our self we cannot know for certain.

For a while you can feel safely anchored in the heart. Balanced, resilient, compassionate, other-centred. But imperceptibly attachments have formed and with them illusions. When reality dawns and exposes these weak links in the chain, the whole chain seems to shatter into pieces. Suddenly, we can be thrown into grief, anger, sadness. As the storm breaks, we may know that this state is temporary and can be assimilated; but we can also feel unable to control it.

At the end of the long day's struggle the heart's health is restored. As with Jesus in his Passion, the ego-will is accommodated to the divine force of love. This unruly love surges unexpectedly and sweeps everything away before it. Only when balance is restored do we see that what seemed like failure and disappointment – and was - was in fact, more truly, grace and growth.

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