The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Weekly Readings 3/3/2013

An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, ?Dearest Friends,?

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The mantra is the focus of this daily mystery lived in the ordinary. It is an act of unity, an expression of love beginning with a new kind of love for one?s self that may at first seem like tough love but which expands into the Trinitarian experience itself

? love of God, love of others, the love of love. It leads to unity in oneself, healing the dualities of the agitated mind (do I want this or that or both, that person is my enemy, that one my object of desire). As this inner division is repaired in the mind we are led into the heart through an immediate re-connection with the Mind of Christ in us. Gradually the reality of continuous prayer unfolds and permeates all activity. Like St Patrick we find Christ as we walk, sleep, rise and work. Even in the midst of modern urban stress, waiting for trains, sitting in traffic jams, dealing with bureaucracy, hanging on the line for automated responses, the calm mind can be aware of the arising of agitation and take steps to define it. Not only is this a wonderful vision of prayer in the Christian tradition (?I am with you always till the end of time?) it is little less than a necessity in the world of division and agitation we have created for ourselves.

How do we know our mind is calming? Simply because in situations of stress, confusion and agitation we are conscious of a peace, joy and clarity that confirm that the Truth is within us. Although we may forget or reject it, it never abandons us. Come back to meditation after a time of infidelity (being unfaithful to meditation or to anything else) and you will see how, once the initial layers of mental guilt or unrest are gone through, a wholehearted homecoming celebration has been prepared, a banquet of love.

This is the context in which the dogmas begin to make sense and become embodied in daily life. Without this calm mind some dogmatic drift into intolerance or fundamentalism is inevitable. I was shocked to hear recently of a seven year old boy who had just made his first confession and woke up that night with a nightmare that God was sending him to the fires of hell because he hadn?t confessed all his sins. One would have thought this demonic image of God was no longer being peddled. It is of the same order as handing drugs to schoolchildren. But its resilience suggests how easily the truth can be perverted and how

important it is to prepare the ground of the calm mind for the reception of any spiritual teaching.

Meditation is iconoclastic. It dissolves every image and concept including those about God. This very ?emptiness? can even scare religious people uninstructed in the contemplative tradition into thinking that meditation is ?not prayer?. But experience shows that soon this calmness of mind becomes the open space in which the fullness of God is revealed. In place of the old and still prevalent monad model of God ? an absolute monarch sitting on a distant throne disposing of the lives of his subjects ? a new understanding of God emerges through the experience of love bestowed and shared as grace. The monadic God is a single unit, alone and all-powerful, capable of mercy as all tyrants are but equally capable of revenge and even random cruelty. Anthropologically it reflects certain kinds of primitive society (not always so absent in modern democracies) and is fed by the self-imaging of the ego itself. This is the ?imagination? that agitates the mind and that John Main called the ?great enemy of prayer?. As this is worn down it becomes easier, more natural, to discover the experience that is waiting for us in the heart.

After meditation: Navajo Chant, cited in Hampton Sides, BLOOD AND THUNDER (New York: Anchor Books, 2006) p. 497.

Beauty before us
Beauty behind us
Beauty around us
In beauty we walk
It is finished in beauty

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