

Frequent flyer | WCCM

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman, OSB, “Frequent Flyer,” The Tablet, August 10, 2004.

For more than 30 years now, I have seen the reactions of those coming for the first time to the annual silent meditation retreat at Monte Oliveto Maggiore, the mother-house of the Olivetan Benedictine congregation. The sheer physical beauty of the place, just south of Siena, might be disturbing at first. As you encounter the peaceful is-ness, the self-confidence of the place and the at-homeness of the white habited monks who live here, your first thought might be that it is so much of a home to someone else that you are condemned to being an outsider. But it proves to be one of those rare places with the grace of making everyone feel at home.

In an age of religious fundamentalism it is enlightening to find a deeply religious environment, which welcomes people of diverse views and cultures. That does not immediately pounce on differences or apply labels of approval or exclusion. That does not harshly judge and condemn or acquit in the name of Christ or Allah or Yahweh. I guess it is this, the friendship of the body with the mind in an environment of natural beauty, the wondrous friendship found in contemplation with strangers, the being together in a living stream of tradition that has not been dammed and gone stagnant, that makes people feel at home.

God, as Aelred of Rievaulx bravely said, is not only love. God is friendship, with oneself, others and the environment. Those who are not in friendship can know nothing of God – even, and especially, in the most heartless certainty of the religious fundamentalist that they are defending God against his enemies. It is part of the spiritual search of our time to long for such a feeling of connexion and mutual trust, for a religion that nurtures community rather than division. And perhaps it is this inclusive, catholic sense of being at home with difference that is the meaning of the real presence. If you really are at home with the self in God you will find yourself at home, in peace and compassion, everywhere.

After meditation: “Pax” by D.H. Lawrence, public domain

All that matters is to be at one with the living God
To be a creature in the house of the God of Life.

Like a cat asleep on a chair
at peace, in peace
and at one with the master of the house, with the
mistress
at home, at home in the house of the living,
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning before the fire.

Sleeping on the hearth of the living world,
yawning at home before the fire of life
feeling the presence of the living God
like a great reassurance
a deep calm in the heart
a presence
as of a master sitting at the board
in his own and greater being,
in the house of life.

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