The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Holy Thursday

A household emerging from deep bereavement has to be taken as it is in any one moment. It might be a dinner moment of sociability and laughter and in the same moment, suddenly, the shadow of pain and loss can fall across everything. The person stricken has to leave the company while everyone understands and feels, at least to some degree the same.

Perhaps our own souls and the world itself are not so different from this alternating patchwork of light and shade, such as covers a whole landscape on a windy day of sun and cloud. In the gospel story of the Passion that we begin today with the Last Supper there is a chiaroscuro effect. The bright light of Jesus' presence, celebrating with his disciples, singing psalms, drinking wine and united in faith and friendship. But this contrasts, horribly at times, with the dark streak of Judas' betrayal and the rising imminence of Jesus being arrested and dragged off for his show trial. In John, it is in this situation that the last teachings of Jesus reach an unsurpassably sublime level of personal self-exposure and disclosure of the truth. Almost every line of the Farewell Discourses offer a lifetime's material for contemplation and enquiry.

The joyful conviviality of life does not always manage to coexist with a tragic sense of loss and pain and it doesn't work to try to force them together prematurely. Yet the more still we remain in the heart of this contradiction the more a miraculous reconciliation takes place. This union of opposites can be thought about but not brought about by thought.

The whole meaning of the Cross is contained in this last meal shared with family and friends. It will show us its meaning if we wait.

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