The World Community for Christian Meditation

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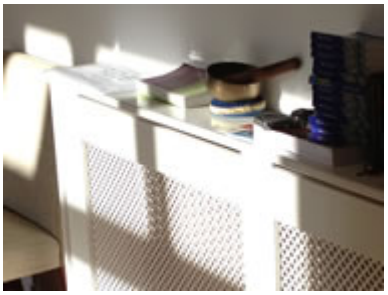
Ash Wednesday



At a monastery I visited recently there is a successful month-long programme of recovery for drug addicts. I was struck by the vow they take at the beginning of their treatment. It is literally a vow to ?truth?.

It implies a commitment to go the whole course and not give up. Or ? such is human nature ? to start again if they do give up. This vow can be taken in the name of their own faith or to the universe. In whatever formula it is an act of trust in themselves, their own depth and transcendent dimension, and so in their capacity to be whole.

Lent is a similar programme. Today many Christians are vividly reminded of our mortality by the ashes placed on their forehead. This sense opens us to the deep humility and realism from which both wisdom and the health of the soul arise. So today is an opportunity. Do we take the vow to be true to that inner depth and whatever mystery we may be embraced by as we enter it?

What shall we do? The soldiers and townspeople once came into the desert to ask John the Baptist this very question. The ancient tradition says there are three dimensions to the ascetical ? ?training? ? aspect of the spiritual journey. We could think of selecting one thing to do in each category.

Reduce or renounce something. Only we know what this might be ? a harmful or unhealthy habit, of body or mind? Whatever trivialises or wastes time. Whatever controls us and gives us a false sense of comfort.

Initiate or strengthen something. Pre-eminently perhaps our meditation. Strengthening this good practice spreads benefits all around our personal universe, both inner and outer.

Giving something away. Anonymously. And with no hope for recognition or reward. And even letting go of the self-satisfaction it might give us. It could be money or time or a smile to a tired and miserable looking cashier at the supermarket.

One of each of these a day but without the greed to be perfect. Just the intention to be true to ourselves. In that way Lent uplifts us and can be fun. And before long we will be ready to see more.

?*Understand what is in front of you and what is hidden from you will be revealed*.? (Gospel of Thomas)

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