

Friday Lent, Week 1



Jesus reassures his disciples that the effort we put into the spiritual quest is never wasted. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. Anyone starting a new venture needs encouragement and self-confidence of this kind. Otherwise, the first setback or discouragement we meet with derails us.

But the confidence we cultivate must be realistic. The Sanskrit word for meditation suggests not instant gratification but gradual cultivation. Clearly Jesus is not a TV evangelist deluding the poor and vulnerable by saying pray for whatever you want and it will drop into your lap the next day. We do not pray to get benefits from God, said Origen the first century Christian teacher, but in order to become like God. What then is the kind of asking, seeking and knocking that constitutes the spiritual journey?

In our hi-tech and very stressful lifestyle we greatly esteem multi-tasking. People who can juggle many things, are admired when they can live with their finger on their iPhone and an eye on the breaking news while cooking lunch. The latest scientific research, however, makes us question this cultural value. It seems that just as learning on a computer screen does not allow knowledge to seek deep into the longterm memory, so multi-tasking reduces the quality of the work done. The multi-tasker does not produce enduring results.

So, ask and you will receive - provided you ask for the one thing necessary and you still remember it five minutes later. Seek and you will find - if you don't get immediately distracted by some other object of attention. The reward of prayer that Jesus promises is not the satisfaction of short-term desires but the radical transformation of desire by the discovery of what it is we really want. Coming to want what we really want is the moral life. Enjoying it, is the contemplative life.

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