The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

Readings for 22/4/2012

From Laurence Freeman OSB, ?The Power of Attention,? THE SELFLESS SELF (London: DLT, 1989), pp. 31-35.

There has always been a great danger, but one that exists especially for us today in our self-conscious and narcissistic society, of mistaking introversion, self-fixation, self-analysis, for true interiority. The great prevalence of psychological woundedness and social alienation exacerbates this danger while calling for gentle tact and compassion in dealing with it. . . .

To be truly interior is the complete opposite of being introverted. In the awareness of the indwelling presence, our consciousness is turned around, converted, so that we are no longer. . .looking at ourselves, anticipating or remembering feelings, reactions, desires, ideas, or daydreams. But we are turning towards something else. And that is always a problem for us.

It would be easier, we think, to turn away from introspection if we knew what we were turning towards. If only we had a fixed object to look at. If only God could be represented by an image. But the true God can never be an image. Images of God are gods. To make an image of God is merely to end up looking at a refurbished image of ourselves. To be truly interior, to open the eye of the heart, means to be living within the imageless vision that is faith, and that is the vision that permits us to ?see God.?

In faith, attention is controlled by a new Spirit, no longer the spirits of materialism, self-seeking and self-preservation, but the ethos of faith which is by its nature dispossessive. It is always letting go and continuously renouncing the rewards of renunciation, which are very great and so all the more necessary to be returned. . . .We can glimpse it simply by calling to mind those moments or phases in life where we experienced the highest degree of peace, fulfillment and joy and recognize that those were times, not when we possessed anything, but when we lost ourselves in something or someone. The passport into the kingdom requires the stamp of poverty. [. . . .]

And yet learning to be other-centered is a discipline, it is discipleship and it means an ascesis. There is nothing more difficult than to learn to take the attention off ourselves. . . . We are all too prone to let our attention wander, to drift back into self-consciousness, self-infatuation,

and distraction. There is then a simple truth to discover. When attention is in God, with the vision of faith, everything reveals God to us. When our attention is on ourselves, in the image-blindness of the ego, everything is a distraction from God.

It seems a demanding challenge to place our attention always in that vision of faith, until we realize that that is precisely what we have been created for.

After meditation: from THE JOURNALS OF THOMAS MERTON: Volume Five 1963-1965 (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 224.

April 4, 1965. Passion Sunday.

Light rain all night. The need to keep working at meditation?going to the root. Mere passivity won?t do at this point. But activism won?t do either. A time of wordless deepening, to grasp the inner reality of my nothingness in Him who is. Talking about it in these terms is absurd. Nothing to do with the concrete reality that is to be grasped. My prayer is peace and struggle in silence, to be aware and true, beyond myself. To go outside the door of myself, not because I will it but because I am called and must respond.

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Source URL: http://www.wccm.org/content/readings-2242012