The World Community for Christian Meditation

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

Readings for 27/11/2011

Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB, "Dearest Friends," The WCCM International Newsletter, October 1997, pp. 2-7.

St Anthony of the Desert once spoke to his monks about the judgment day which they would each confront in their moment of death. He told them that they would not be judged on how far they had become like him, or like any of the other great masters of the desert, but to what degree they had become truly themselves.

Holiness as the goal and meaning of human existence may be a quality we recognize in many different people, a scent we are conscious of. There is a universality about holiness which cuts across age, culture and religious boundaries. It is not the product of a particular brand of training and however much individual ideologies try to claim it for themselves it defies any attempt to label it. What is universal about its nature is that it becomes perceptible in people who have become themselves. Holiness is the presence of God in the human beings who are God's image. Becoming holy is then simply the conscious reunion of image and original.

So much of life seems to fade from memory. Problems that torment us or pleasures that thrill us, plans that absorb us totally, inconsolable griefs that seem they will end our life, are all tempered by time. There are other experiences, often not so emotionally overwhelming at the time they occur, which do not fade. We remember these epiphanies of pure consciousness most deeply because they become part of us. In the often quiet and modest way in which they happened they peeled away some of the usual obscuring layers and revealed to us what we are truly like, who we really are. In this awakening there was no great thunderclap, no mystical headlines. But it was real news. Something whose news-worthiness did not fade with the morning papers. These are the earthquakes of stillness which rearrange the landscape of our life, the hurricanes of silence which change the way we listen and speak for the rest of our life. We remember the moment of such epiphanies because, for some reason we can never explain, we were ready for them when they happened even though they took us by surprise. And we were awake when they happened. Probably, without realising it we had just died.

I remember, for example, as a boy coming home from school, how I would often stand at a shop window displaying what were for me irresistibly gorgeous foreign stamps. One day an older friend of my family walked past and interrupted my rapt contemplative gaze to greet me. The next day, as I was standing at the same window on my usual way home, the same person walked by and with an amused expression asked me if I had been there since yesterday. Something indescribable but utterly familiar flashed on within me which is with me to this day--a self- awareness, a being taken by surprise but without fear, the knowledge that we exist in the universe of others as well as in our own. Whatever the way we describe such moments---and they are very common because they punctuate our growth in consciousness---they are the proofs we need that we are real. That we exist. And when that proof has sunk deeply enough into us we begin to find the meaning of existence as a growth in holiness.

Holiness is perhaps like music. It is indescribable except in its own language. But it is a universal language that can be heard and appreciated by people. In a society like ours where religious language and traditions have become such a specialized dialect rather than a common and unifying language, this music of holiness is especially important. Holiness unites us in friendship and in a common belief in the core goodness of humanity. [. . . .]

St Benedict warns his monks in the chapter on the "tools of good works" not to wish to be called holy before one truly is. The irony of course is that by the time one is truly holy one will no longer want to be called holy. Or anything for that matter. As long as we are concerned that people should pay us "honour," think and speak well of us, we have a good test of the fact that we are still a way off. . . .We grow in holiness by caring for "the honour? that comes from the one who alone is God. . . .

After Meditation, from Eileen O?Hea, IN WISDOM?S KITCHEN: THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION (New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 81

Our spiritual journey invites us to an experience of love so deep and so profound that it is more than words can ever describe or we can possibly imagine. On this journey Mother/Father God coaxes us through the birth canal of our spiritual life, the canal that leads us from the ego to the true self. This shift in which we re-locate our identity brings with it both the labor and pain of birth and the freedom and joy of new life. We find this new life in the experience of contemplative consciousness or communion consciousness. . .These words express a reality that cannot be fully expressed. Here the self lacks nothing and finds everything. It is the experience of coming home.

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