

## Tuesday of Lent Week 3



?I have nothing, I want nothing, I know nothing.? The refrain of the medieval mystics might sound a touch negative to our ears and the personal pronoun perhaps suspiciously highlighted. Too much I in the assertion of no-self.

So: those who know do not speak and those who speak do not know. This is an old challenging wisdom. But not so practical. In Maximus the Confessor we are told there is a half-way place The person who knows has a short window of opportunity to speak while the experience is still fresh.

But when the scent of the newly-baked bread has gone, better keep quiet about it. This is relevant not only to spiritual writers but to all of us in a culture that speaks before it thinks and rarely listens deeply to what others are saying.

It is very difficult to find the words to describe the deepest experiences on our journey through the Desert to the Promised Land, through life to Life. We have to be restrained and not jump on every weakness or apparent contradiction. In the case of a receding horizon it is hard to keep perspective; yet we need to keep going, looking and moving ahead. Otherwise, like every committee ever set up for whatever cause, we easily get stuck in the disputatiousness of the ego. Arguing our own point of view from attachment to our own version of reality. Egotism loses sight of the big picture which these empty ? or anyway less acquisitive ? days of Lent help to bring into focus again.

What is implied in the triple medieval refrain is a conclusion left silent: *I am nothing*. The I is swallowed up in the nothingness and can no longer speak or think about itself or its favourite subjects. This sounds pure negativity outside of the experience of prayer. In the pure prayer of meditation ? the thinner, unpolluted atmosphere of the high mountains where rock meets air ? the edge of nothing is felt as the beginning of the full promise of being. The nothingness is

understood, deeper than words, as the thing that gives fullness to our emptiest days.

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