The World Community for Christian Meditation

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

Weekly Teachings 18/11/2012

Apatheia and agape

The virtue of repentance helps us to become aware of our ego-centric emotions and it leads to humility, as we become more and more aware of our need of God and that without Christ we can?t do anything.

Acknowledgement of our woundedness, this healing insight, leads to a growing sense of harmony and balance in our emotional life. Moreover, as we know ourselves to be loved despite our faults we can increasing accept and love our fellow human beings, for we see ourselves reflected in them: ?A monk is a man who considers himself one with all men, because he seems constantly to see himself in every man.? (Evagrius-Chapters on Prayer)

Evagrius called this harmonious way of being that we are growing towards with the help of grace a combination of ?apatheia? and ?agape?, emotional integration and Divine love, intimately connected: ?Agape is the child of apatheia.?
Cassian did not use this term ?apatheia?, but called it ?purity of heart?. Thomas Merton explains that ?purity of heart?, a total acceptance of ourselves and of our situation?.renunciation of all deluded images of ourselves, all exaggerated estimates of our own capacities, in order to obey God?s will as it comes to us.

Contemplatives are often reproached with the fact that their effort is ?selfish?, that they are only concerned with their own salvation. To Evagrius and the Desert Fathers and Mothers prayer was paramount; it was the meaning of life for them. But yet we hear the following story: ?It can happen that when we are at prayer some brothers come to see us. Then we have to choose, either to interrupt our prayer or to sadden our brother by refusing to answer him. But love is greater than prayer. Prayer is one virtue amongst others, whereas love contains them all.? (John Climacus 7th Century)

Only when we have put our own house in order, can we genuinely feel compassion for others and be of support: ?Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation.? (St

Seraphim of Sarov). We are urged never to forget that we are truly one in Christ and what happens to our neighbour is of ultimate concern to us: ?Life and death depend on our neighbour. If we gain our brother, we gain God. But if we scandalize our brother we are sinning against Christ. (St Anthony)

The spiritual path helps us to close the gap between ourselves and others. We are our brother?s keeper. The world will as a result become a more peaceful place; not by our changing the world but by changing our own attitude from one of self-interest to one of being concerned about one another, regardless of family connections, background, culture or religion: ?Be the change you want to see in the world.?(Gandhi) - the essence of Jesus? teaching.

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For further help with setting up and leading groups, please look HERE.