



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Weekly Teachings 2/9/2012



The power of language

“He also said: “It is better to eat meat and drink wine than eat the flesh of one’s brethren through slander.” (Abba Hyperechius)

Not only was gossiping and slander frowned upon, because they were part of judging others, but also because the desert hermits were convinced of the power of language to heal and to harm.

We need to remember that the third century was still largely an oral culture. Spoken words were considered potent, not only those from Scripture, but also the words spoken by the Abbas and Ammas. Since they were considered “pure of heart”, theirs were words of power, that healed and renewed life. But they were also very aware of the damage a careless word could do. They considered carefully when to speak and when to be silent. Hence the importance they attached to Silence in general. It avoided careless, harmful talk and granted the opportunity for words of wisdom to emerge. Although we no longer live in an oral culture, we too know the power of an encouraging or disparaging word to those walking the spiritual path with us.

From the many sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers we know of the importance attached to Scripture. Most of the hermits’ knowledge came from hearing the Word at the synaxis, the weekly gathering of monks. One saying tells of a brother, who had temporarily been distracted and forgotten to say some words of the psalm that was being recited. An elder came to him and said: “Where were your thoughts, when we were saying the synaxis, that the word of the psalm escaped you? Don’t you know that you were standing in the presence of God and speaking to God??” Meditation, repeating certain words from Scripture, reciting them by heart, helped the monks to deal with their thoughts and temptations, their own inner “demons”. Often they were plagued by memories of their previous life or remorse for things they had done or left undone. Cassian calls the formula he recommends - “O God come to my aid, O lord make haste to help me” - “an unassailable wall, an impenetrable breastplate,

and a very strong shield?. You no doubt remember, how he stressed that: ?You should, I say, meditate constantly on this verse in your heart. You should not stop repeating it when you are doing any kind of work or performing some service or are on a journey. Meditate on it while sleeping and eating and attending to the least needs of nature.?

Scripture was the foundation of their life. When some monks came to ask St Antony, how they should live, they were told: ?You have heard Scripture. That should teach you how.? We too should not neglect reading Jesus? words in Scripture. Reading Scripture after meditation or even better at another time in a Benedictine ?Lectio Divina? way, i.e. taking a small passage and reading it several times slowly and carefully is very helpful. Laurence Freeman, our director said, that in doing so ?we read Scripture and let Scripture read us.?

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For further help with setting up and leading groups, please look [HERE](#).

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