



Meditatio

TALKS SERIES 2014 C · JUL- SEP

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Awakening

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“The task of prayer is to awaken the heart; to awaken it above all to the reality of the presence of God’s indwelling Spirit. Learning to meditate is to become fully awake, fully alive in the Spirit.”

As we enter the silence within ourselves, we must understand that we are, quite literally, being unmade. St Paul calls the response to Christian life a 'new creation'. We are not being destroyed but are being awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being, the life of the Lord Jesus bubbling up within us.

are being made new. And as we enter the deeper centre of our own being, we experience more fully that harmony, the harmonious centre and source of all being, the most Holy Trinity. 'When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world.' (2 Cor 5:17)

Now time and again we have spoken about the death and resurrection of Jesus as being as it were the paradigm of all being. That is the great model on which each one of us must build our life: the dying to triviality, to possessiveness and egoism; the rising to that fullness of liberty of spirit where we find our true self created in the image and likeness of God, and we gaze upon him.

Our invitation as Christians is simply to become awake to the mysterious power of God within us. This is what we have to lead our brothers and sisters to. And to approach this awakening, we need to be still, to be silent and to be attentive. The only way that I know of, the only path that I know that leads to this is the path of the one little word, the mantra. ■

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*A*wakening of spirit

In the silence of meditation, we are being prepared for this awakening of spirit. That wakefulness is our encounter with the fullness of the splendour of Jesus, Jesus in his own fully awakened state to which the Resurrection led him. It is not the historical Jesus who died that we encounter in our hearts. It is the Risen Lord, the fully awakened Jesus, the fully powerful Jesus, the Jesus who sent us his Spirit to make all things new.

Again, I must beware of allowing my own enthusiasm for meditation from misleading you about the perseverance that is required for the pilgrimage. Even though you may know all this intellectually – the splendour of the Lord Jesus Christ flooding our hearts – we must be prepared for the suffering involved in meditation, which we forget.

What we experience to begin with is very often a shedding of qualities; a reduction not an expansion of spirit, because we are having to leave behind familiar paths, familiar ways of thinking, and we are moving towards this poverty of spirit that can be extraordinarily threatening as we begin our pilgrimage. But we've got to tread this path with simplicity, and we have to get used to *being* simple. We have to follow Jesus to Calvary. We have to, in his words, take up our cross daily. We do this, not in any self-dramatising or self-obsessive way, but we do so with joy, knowing that to rise in his transcendent life we must die, we must die to self. Paul puts it beautifully: 'Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed.' (2 Cor 4:16) *Day by day*. That is the capacity that the Christian must have for the daily taking up of the cross, the daily renewal, the daily rising with the Lord Jesus. And in our daily meditation you will come to love and cherish them, as you persevere, as the most precious moments of your day, because we

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We must be very honest, as we consider our own vocation as Christians, that we understand the *utterness* of the invitation of Christ, that we understand the *total* giving of himself that calls for that total response from us. Christianity isn't that sort of thing that you can fool around with, because once we have understood the total commitment of Jesus Christ the Son of God to *you*, your only course of action is to commit yourself. In understanding that, you understand your total dedication to the demands of the Gospel.

As we enter the silence within ourselves we must understand that we are, quite literally, being *unmade*. As you know, St Paul constantly calls the response to Christian life a 'new creation', a new creation, something totally new created out of the power of what Jesus has accomplished. And so, in accepting the invitation of Jesus to follow him, we accept that the old self dies. The old man dies, was crucified, in fact, with Christ. We are unmade. And we must be very clear that none of us can be the person we were. The invitation to all of us is much greater. It is to rise a new man with Jesus. Again, the wonder of the experience of prayer is that we are not being destroyed, but we are being awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being. Again, in the language of Jesus, 'I shall put a living spring of water within you.' (Jn 4:14) And that's what it is quite literally, the life of the Lord Jesus bubbling up within us. As Andre Louf puts it so beautifully:

In our prayer we become aware that we are being created, that we are springing from the creator's hand and returning to him in love. (Teach Us to Pray, Darton Longman Todd).

It is that living dynamic quality that is the experience of prayer. That is what Jesus is always talking about: We are alive with his life, and we return with him to the Father. ■

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Prayer is the life of the Spirit of Jesus within the human heart, the Spirit which takes each one of us fully awakened to the Father. Prayer is awakening to this Spirit in all its fullness in our heart. Our times of prayer, are simply times when we make a complete turn of consciousness to the ever-present Reality.

at the end than at the beginning. Just say the mantra and keep saying the mantra. This is what will free you from the bondage that prevents the majority of people from praying with absolute freedom. It will free you from the chains of your own repressed fears and anxieties that are the principal cause of those surface distractions. That is why this form of prayer is of such immense importance, because it frees you from those compulsions and the chains of guilt and fear.

There is a risk involved in this pilgrimage to silence. It is a risk because it involves the whole of your being. You can't say, 'Okay. I'll try the mantra for a bit.' Once you start to seek for the Lord Jesus in the depths of your own being there is no alternative but for you to be willing to surrender your entire being to him. As you progress through these spheres of silence, you will encounter the light and the love of the Spirit of Jesus. We know that light as something utterly beyond us and yet the source of everything we are. So we put our entire trust in the Lord Jesus who calls us to leave all things and follow him; so we leave everything in creation to follow the Creator. As we say the mantra we are, in fact, exploring the infinite depths of our own poverty – poverty of mind and poverty of spirit. And then we come to experience the absolute dependence that we have on the Lord God. Placing ourselves entirely in his arms we find the life that we laid down, the life that we surrendered, restored to us a hundredfold. In fact, we find our life for the first time.

As you know, St Paul was able to cry, 'I live now no longer, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20). Paul's witness to Christ was a witness that was absolutely radiant with the risen life of the Lord. That was the source and the ground of his authority; and we must proclaim the Gospel with the same authority, all of us. Jesus has told us that we can only be followers of his if we leave self behind and take up our cross daily. Notice those words when Jesus tells us about the mechanics of following Him: *daily* is the way he puts it, every day. I want to stress to you again the paramount, the supreme importance of your daily meditation, morning and evening. That is something you've got to build into your lives with a sort of fanaticism.

The wakefulness of meditation

silence, because once we come into the presence of the Mystery all we can do is bow and bend low.

I want to stress to you that the authority that is needed for the proclamation of the Gospel can only be gained if we undertake that pilgrimage so that we can encounter within ourselves, in the silence of our own spirit, the loving silence of the Lord Jesus. This is what we need, men and women of authority who speak out of their own experience, who speak of what they know.

For most modern people, silence is a very threatening thing; it's very difficult for people to sit in silence. This silence is something that we have to get used to, that we have to work for.

Now when we begin to meditate, as you may know already from your experience, we have to face that fantastic indiscipline of our minds. Our minds are just hopping away like a little child who has just been given a hoop or something like that, and we cannot control it. It's just whizzing around everywhere as we are trying to say our mantra and just saying, 'It's impossible; I can't do it.' That is the first thing you've got to do, you've got to face that initial shame that you cannot control your mind. And as long as we cannot control it we cannot come to that deep silence within us, because the din is too great. That's where the mantra and the simplicity of it fulfils its first task: to bring those surface areas of the mind into harmony with the deeper peacefulness within. That is the first task of the mantra.

The second task of the mantra is this. Once you've got those surface areas cleared, you do encounter frequently, not always, the darker side of your being where repressed fears, repressed guilt, feelings about things that we shouldn't have done that we've done, or worse still perhaps things that we didn't do that we cannot now do because people have died or whatever. Those fears and guilts and repressions can cause us a quite a problem. And you've just got to, in a spirit of deep faith, continue saying the mantra and let all that garbage and trivia and the rest of it just spend itself.

So I want to warn you. Don't be surprised if you come from your meditation in the early stages – that's the first twenty years or so – feeling that you have this anxiety, or that you're feeling less relaxed

The writers of the Eastern Church, the Orthodox tradition, said that the task of prayer is to awaken the heart, to awaken the heart above all to the reality of the presence of God's indwelling Spirit. They speak of our hearts being asleep. I think there is a real sense in which learning to meditate is learning to become fully alive, fully alive in the Spirit. And we are of course fully alive only when we are fully awake. When the Buddha's disciples went to him and asked, 'Who are you? Are you the all-wise? Are you the almighty? Are you the all-powerful?' the Buddha replied, 'I am the one who is awake. I am awake.' That wakefulness is of the essence of meditation.

Take the words that Jesus himself spoke to the disciples in Gethsemane – you remember, he had gone off to pray, to pray by himself. As Matthew puts it, he went by himself to 'stay awake and pray'; and when he came back to the disciples, who had fallen asleep, he said: 'Could you not stay awake and pray with me?' Mark puts a slightly different emphasis when he says: 'Could you not be alert and be wakeful?' Meditation therefore, in the Christian tradition too, is this process that helps us to move towards a totally wakeful state by becoming deeply sensitive to the living Spirit of God dwelling within us. To achieve this we need to develop a certain skill that isn't at all common among our contemporaries: being totally relaxed and totally awake *at the same time*. Falling asleep at meditation has always been a big problem because once we start to relax, we immediately get into the area of sleep.

Saying the mantra is just the coming to this alert stillness. And it can be quite a problem as most of us are used to becoming quite busy in our rites and our rituals and the saying of our prayers. I don't know whether any of you have had the experience in your own homes, but I used to be absolutely terrified when I would go and

The basic theology of meditation

stay in my grandfather's home, because everybody would be gathered for the family rosary and after the rosary interminable prayers would be added at the end of the rosary. One of my sisters who was deputed to say the rosary one night just stopped at the end and refused to go on to all these prayers that would be added on. My aunt or someone urged her, 'The prayers! Go on, the prayers!' So she added: 'From creepies and crawlies and things that go bump in the night, O Lord, deliver us.' To the horror of all at Kerry! We are so used to being busy in our prayers, to multiply prayers, that just becoming silent, just becoming quiet is quite a problem for us. And we've always got to be aware too that we don't just float off into that 'holy-dozy' sort of state, which is what John Cassian calls the '*pax pernicioza*' or '*sopor letalis*'. I want you to understand this carefully so that you can recognise it when it comes.

There is a real danger here too, because the religious person likes this somewhat pleasant pious religiosity, a feeling of being, as I say, slightly stoned in a religious way. This can become a half-living limbo. There is a real sense in which many people get stranded in this limbo, where they just float. They do not make an further progress at all in prayer; they don't become as it were fully alive, don't become fully awake, and don't advert to the Presence within which is a waking experience of the living God.

At the root of this unreality, what one could call this 'unspiritual religiosity', is our evasion of our responsibility to enter fully into the present moment. You know, I'm sure, the great expression of St Irenaeus: 'The glory of God is man fully alive.' To be fully alive, we have to respond totally to the reality of the here and now.

This is a bigger problem than you might imagine because it is so much easier apparently for Christians to opt for the past. So many Christians seem to prefer this backward project into the historical life of Christ himself, and to be constantly as it were locked in to the historical life of Christ. So much so, that they lose contact with the living Christ, the Risen Christ, the Risen Lord, who lives *now* in my heart. And that seems to me to be one of the great dangers of reducing your prayer to merely considerations about the historical life of Jesus.

Therefore, now that we have been justified through faith, let us continue at peace, at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have been allowed to enter the sphere of God's grace, where we now stand. Let us exult in the hope of the divine splendour that is to be ours. More than this: let us even exult in our present sufferings, because we know that suffering trains us to endure, and endurance brings proof that we have stood the test, and this proof is the ground of hope. And such a hope is no mockery, because God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us. (Rom 5:1-5)

I want to try to give you a summary of the basic theology of meditation. The first thing that we have to understand is the wonder and marvel of silence. I want you to listen to this from the Maitrya Upanishad:

There is something beyond our mind which abides in silence in our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one's mind and one's subtle body rest on that and rest on nothing else.

In the Christian tradition, St Ignatius of Antioch wrote these memorable words of his: 'It is better to be silent and real, rather than to talk and be unreal.' This is the purpose of our meditation: to come to that ultimate reality, the *ultimate* reality which is beyond our mind. The great tragedy of our time is that we think that we will get everything by our ratiocination. We in the Christian tradition are almost as bad as anyone in this by our defining man as a rational creature. What we have to learn to do is to be silent, to be filled with awe, and to worship. And worship is impossible without first

to an integration of our selfhood where every part of ourself is in his loving, harmonious response to the Father. Our aim is to accept fully the salvation that Jesus has achieved for us, the total deliverance from everything that is isolating, total union with the whole of creation. And what we discover is our own essential unity. As we discover too – an intoxicating discovery – the absolute freedom that we possess to soar to the Father.

Now, don't let me mislead you with rhetoric. There is no doubt about the absolute demand of the mantra. There is a real sense in which saying the mantra is such an act of pure faith that it amounts to religious recklessness because it is, in essence, our total acceptance of the reality of God's love flooding our inmost heart through the Spirit of the Risen Jesus. And it calls us to die to self. It's an absolute renunciation to throw ourselves completely upon the love of Jesus. And it is only that absolute renunciation, and absolute faith, that allows us to rise in his power, to share his power, to share his authority, and above all to share his love.

And I want to end by saying as clearly as I can that we cannot manufacture or anticipate this experience. Experience is a gift of God. All we can do is to learn to be still, to be silent, and to wait. And as we learn that stillness and silence, and as we learn to wait, we will do so with an ever-growing sense of our own potential and our own harmony. We must be patient and we must wait. In God's time we will experience the flooding of our heart with the love of Jesus and we will be ready to respond to that summons when it comes, a summons that asks us to respond to the fullness of our own personhood in this encounter with Jesus. Every member in the Church is called to this awakening; every member of the human race is called to this awakening. Our great responsibility is to wake up ourselves, to be ready, to be at the disposition of the Father, and then in humility and love to bring the glory, the enlightenment of that wakefulness to all mankind. ■

What you must do is to encounter the living Lord in your own heart, and then find him as it were living in the living Word of Scripture. That Jesus lived historically is, of course, of supreme importance. I don't deny that for a moment. But the essence of the New Testament is that the Lord Jesus *lives*. The Risen Christ lives, and he lives in my heart. And it is with the dimension of his vital and vitalising presence within me that I must come to read the account of his historical life.

Now that is one danger of the Christian man, backward project into the past, projecting ourselves back into the past. On the other hand, many religious I think have this other danger: We have a kind of cultivated anticipation of the future. We think: 'Well *now*, I have got my work to do. I have got my professional responsibilities – I have got my work to keep up with and keep abreast of what is going on, all the journals to read, all the rest of it. But one day I will achieve holiness, I will set out to achieve holiness. One day I will have time to live my life in the presence of God. But now I am in that group, or congregation, or world and must get on with the actual business of living.'

The task of meditation is to concentrate our attention wholly in and on the present moment, which Paul tells us has in it Christ's design and purpose everywhere at work. If you look at the tenses of the verbs – in his Letter to the Ephesians, for example – you'll find there is this vital sense of the living Christ now at work in the world. As Christians, our task is to be at work with him, in him, and through him. St Gregory wrote of St Benedict: 'He dwelt within himself, always remaining in the presence of his Creator, and not allowing his eyes to gaze on distractions.' Here is a magnificent description of our aim in prayer, in meditation, which is to enter wholly into the actuality of our being. To be alive, to be alert to the presence of God within our being and to concentrate our whole attention on that presence and, as it were, to find inspiration for everything that we are and everything we do from that presence.

The essential idea in St Paul is that *now* is the acceptable time, *now* is the day of salvation. And we cannot be wholly religious if we want to live on past religious capital or future religious development.

The significant moment is the present moment. In meditation we seek to enter fully into the *now*; and there to live to the utmost with the now risen, ever-living, and ever-loving Lord Jesus.

One of the principal hazards of our religion today is that we have underestimated the magnificence and the wonder of our vocation, of our invitation. Because to be committed in the present moment and to the present moment is in fact to find ourselves, to come near to ourselves; to as it were take that real self and the imagined self, and get them together real, in a state of dynamic equilibrium. This we do by moving away from the image of ourselves, our *ego*, which usually lives anywhere except in the present. And by making that decided act of faith in the presence of the living Lord, we find within us the present actuality of the risen life of Jesus; with all the power, love, that faith creates. ■

The spirit of Jesus in the human heart

Prayer is the life of the Spirit of Jesus within the human heart, the Spirit in whom we are incorporated in the Body of Christ, the Spirit which takes each one of us fully awakened to the Father. Prayer is awakening to this Spirit in all its fullness in our heart.

I don't think there are forms or methods of prayer; there is only *prayer*. And that prayer I like to think of as the stream of love between the Spirit of the Risen Jesus and his Father, the stream of love in which we are incorporated. Similarly, once you begin to pray, you pray always. There is no part-time prayer or partial prayer. The Spirit is always alive in our heart, and that stream of love is always a reality in our heart. Our times of meditation, our times of prayer, are simply times when we make this complete turn of consciousness to the ever-present Reality.

The more you give yourself to this, plunging deeply into this stream of love, the more you become aware of what St Paul meant when he called us to pray without ceasing. This is the state that is sometimes called enlightenment, when the awareness of the reality of the love of Jesus for his Father is constant in our hearts. Insofar as we can be analytical about this, what we are aware of is our total poverty, our total dependence upon the sustaining love of God and our infinite enrichment in that love.

As I have been talking to you about a journey, about a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is to the source level of your own being. We are on that pilgrimage as long as we say our mantra with simplicity and persevere in our renunciation, in our poverty, renouncing thought, imagination, and ultimately our own very self-consciousness. As the mantra becomes rooted more and more deeply in us, and more thoroughly integrated in our consciousness, so does our whole being participate in this response to the Spirit. The journey leads us

awareness became clear in our minds or our hearts. But what we are aware of is that, as we continue to say our mantra humbly and faithfully, the world around is gradually transformed and our heart within us is totally transformed, transfigured by the love of the Lord.

We must understand that every one of us is called to a spiritual maturity in which we do become alive with the life of God. Those are St Peter's words: 'alive with the life of God'(1 Pet 4:6). And we do this not by thinking about God, not by imagining God, not by inventing imaginary conversations with him; but we do it by allowing his presence to become the sole reality in our consciousness. ■

Surrender of self

I want to present to you what underlies this vision that is so clear in the Gospel of Matthew, of the absoluteness of the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus and in his teaching. If people are hindered entering the Kingdom, it is in no small part due to the Pharisaical teachers, the false prophets preventing them or misleading them. But also, Jesus says that everyone of us must accept the responsibility ourselves to understand the absoluteness of the demand that this entry into the Kingdom makes upon each of us.

You can't read the Gospel of Matthew without seeing how frank Jesus is, how absolutely straight from the shoulder he speaks, and also how uncompromising he is. It isn't as though we have to pay some sort of fee to get into the Kingdom. We have to pay with our very selves. That is the payment: the fullness of everything that we are. In spite of the fact that Jesus tells us that we will be rewarded a hundredfold even in this life, still we hang back.

'No servant can be the slave of two masters,' he says. 'You cannot serve God and man. Therefore, I tell you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive.' (Mt 6:24-25)

And so Jesus tells us not only to abandon material things and placing our hope and confidence in material things, but also to not even think about them interiorly as well. This is the 'narrow gate' that is so often in his vocabulary.

Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition; there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way. But the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find this are few. (Mt 7:13-14)

That's why in our meditation we concentrate the whole of our

attention on to the Lord Jesus. It is like a kind of laser beam; it's as narrow as that but it leads to life. If we can only concentrate our whole attention on the Lord, then the whole of creation opens up now enlightened by this light. The Lord is light and life.

We've got to leave self behind. As you know I am sure, from your general studies about Scripture, this whole business of the gate being narrow, refers to the narrow entrance in the city wall of a modern Jewish town. The camel loaded with the goods of the rich man just cannot get through it; the camel has to be unloaded before it can get through. And Jesus is constantly using this metaphor as people saw it before their eyes every day. We can't get through into this place where all the goods are laid out, where the riches of the kingdom of God are to be found, unless we first unload our *self* of all our excess baggage, as it were. That's the force of what Jesus says: 'If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind.' (Mt 16:24)

It is important for us to understand that although Jesus preaches perfection he was not fanatical. He accepted that there were stages of perfection through which we all pass on our way to this absolute surrender of self. In the story of the rich young man who asked what else he should do to inherit eternal life apart from keeping the commandments and so forth, Jesus showed him that the renunciation of wealth was the *beginning* of perfection. It was a setting, a point of departure for this absolute surrender: 'If you wish to go the whole way, then, first go and sell your possessions, give to the poor, and then you will have riches in heaven; and then come follow me.' (Mt 19:21) Now, we all take this in our very materialistic way, that this was perfection – to sell your possessions. But Jesus is saying no, not at all; this is the *first step*. If you want to follow me, sure; but first of all get rid of all this extraneous garbage here and *then* come and follow me. That's another reason why saying the mantra and experiencing that poverty within ourselves will help you to read Scripture with a much more alert and much more sensitive perception.

So the keynote of Jesus' preaching with regards perfection is this surrender of self. He does not ask us to do this in any solemn way or in any complex way. The essence is simplicity. 'I tell you this: Unless

loneliness, guilt, rejection. The totally free and totally loving man Jesus lives in our hearts, and in us he lives in an entirely personal, loving relationship with us. And what he calls us to is a full consciousness of his presence. That is what it means to be a Christian: to be converted, to be fully conscious of the life of the loving Lord Jesus within our heart.

Jesus has awakened, become fully awake, fully conscious of the love of his Father, and we are called to exactly the same consciousness, to exactly the same love. And the tragedy of so much Christianity over the centuries has been that we have underestimated this so fantastically, because what we realise too is that in awakening to the love of the Lord Jesus we awaken to complete communion with all creation in the love of Jesus in the Father. The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has said that if we could get one per cent of the people of the world to meditate we would solve every problem that confronts mankind. Now there is a lot in what he said. One of the examples that he gives is the environmental problem. If we understood our communion with the forests and the rivers and the mountains and the plains, we wouldn't treat them in the shameful, barbarous way that we do. The Maharishi puts forward that this is one of the principle tasks that mankind has: to enter into a loving relationship with his environment; and if he doesn't, we are doomed.

So I want to put before you the dimension of what we are about. We are not just talking about something that will bring us a little bit of peace of mind or make us a little bit more efficient in doing our job. We are talking about something that will bring us to a full awareness of our own place in creation; about our relationship with the Creator, with all creation and all created beings. That is why too meditation is the principal road to humility: you understand your own place, you understand your own relationships. You understand that the loving Father is at the centre of all creation.

Now we begin all this with a very dim awareness of the stirring of the Spirit in our heart. All we have to do is to be simple and faithful and say our mantra. I think it is true of all of us as we look back on our meditation, that we could never say at what moment this

he showed us in sending us his Son.’ (1 Jn 4:10) In most of the religions, the religious act is man moving to God. In the Christian religion the deepest religious actions are always God stooping down to man. As long as our faith is seen as comprising the movement from man to God, we must remain self-centred, we must remain earthbound.

The great thing about our meditation is that we are learning to be still, to be silent, to be aware, so that the Lord Jesus may manifest himself to us, within us; so that his love may become real in us, become realised in us. What we discover in deep prayer is that we ourselves are caught up in this movement that goes on within us, of the love of the Lord Jesus returning to his Father. And that is how we achieve our own self-transcendence: We are quite literally taken out of ourselves in a movement of ecstasy, rapture. Another name for the movement is love.

Something I have tried to stress to you is that we must understand our own loveableness. That is the great importance of community, that everyone who comes into your community understands fully, explicitly, clearly, their own lovableness. And the first step to full personhood and to full maturity is that we allow ourselves to be loved. So often, we are keeping others at a distance. And this is precisely why the Lord Jesus has sent us his Holy Spirit, sent his Spirit into our hearts – to touch us, to awaken us, and to draw us into the redemptive light of that love of Jesus. Remember the words of Richard of St Victor that as we meditate we become aware of the love of the Lord Jesus. We *feel* the love of the Lord Jesus. And then we see a great light enlightening the whole of our being and we apprehend it as the divine light.

It is an extraordinary thing, but I am sure you have run across this in your own experience too, that so many people are reluctant to allow themselves to be loved, because the level of fearfulness is so deeply implanted in so many hearts. This is why I stress to you that our experience in prayer is of the Risen Jesus, and our experience is of his fullness and of his freedom. This is the Lord we meet in our prayer, the Jesus who has transcended every limitation of the human condition, all the limitations of fear, ignorance,

you turn around, and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’ (Mt18:3) And that’s the keynote again of Jesus’ preaching. It is this childlike simplicity – not complexified, not making it complicated – absolute simplicity that allows us to open our hearts to Jesus in a completely childlike and trusting way.

Jesus associates perfection with poverty. Again, all of us have great difficulty in understanding this concept of poverty. And I don’t think that any of you will understand it until you learn to root that mantra in your heart. That is poverty that renounces all concern for self at the innermost heart of your being. Secondly, simplicity, childlike, complete trust in the Lord. These are the two points that I want you to get absolutely clear in your own life: simplicity and poverty.

Jesus – again we have to be very honest about this – said in his proclamation of the Gospel that the attainment of these qualities will involve suffering. We’ve got to be prepared for that. He warns that once they have been gained to any real degree they will bring his followers persecution, because his followers then will be like him, telling the truth to those who do not want to hear it. ‘My brothers,’ St John wrote to the early Christians, ‘do not be surprised if the world hates you.’ Do not be surprised; in fact we ought to be pleased. What Jesus tells us, however, is this, that the suffering that is involved in the following of his Gospel is nothing compared to the joy of being with him and going with him to the Father. ■

Jesus as a teacher of prayer

Jesus was, in his own day, everything that we would understand and describe today in popular language as a *guru*, a teacher. He had this hidden life for thirty years before it culminated in his active ministry. The Gospel account of his life shows us that he had rabbinical learning after a long period of preparation; then the trial in the desert for forty days; and then during his ministry, the periods of solitude when he withdrew from the crowds to be alone with his heavenly Father. You know he was addressed as 'Rabbi', which is the Hebrew word for *guru*, teacher. Perhaps the most famous line in the whole of Scripture identifying Jesus as a teacher is in Luke: 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' (Lk 11:1)

It is important for us to understand that Jesus did not teach new, esoteric techniques of prayer. He didn't as it were suggest any magic formulas. The Lord's Prayer itself is not some sort of magic spell. Because he was a teacher, because he was a prophet, he came to recall man to prayer. He took prayer as the ground of their being, not in the sense of restoring ancient rites or ancient customs from which people had fallen away, but he was recalling people to the basic, necessary fundamental attitude we must have to God, to God as the most significant and important relationship in our life – in human life. For Jesus, this attitude was not a matter of words or forms, but of the experience of our complete and utter dependence upon God. And the attitude that he denounced with the strongest possible exhortation was wordiness, formalism, and pedantry, which ousted the basic experience of our dependence upon God.

What did Jesus say explicitly about prayer? He taught essentially that prayer is an inner and intimate dimension of our relationship with the Father. Just as we are told that we must not make a show

Alive with the life of God

What our meditation leads us to is the fullness of the life of Christ within us. In saying our mantra we just allow ourselves to mature, to become fully ourselves, so that our encounter with the Lord Jesus may itself be fully personal and a fully mature encounter. This is a reading from the Letter to the Galatians:

To prove that you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying 'Abba! Father!' You are therefore no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then also by God's own act, an heir. For through faith you are all sons of God in union with Christ Jesus. Baptised into union with him, you have all put on Christ as a garment. (Gal 4:6-7; 3:26-27)

What we have to do, in the language of the East, is to realise ourselves, to become fully ourselves, to know ourselves fully. I suppose it would be true to say that in the modern world fewer and fewer people do really know themselves, know who they are, feel in touch with themselves. And if you multiply enough distractions in your life, you need never even address that question; and that's again one of the tragedies of much of our Christian living.

In every loving relationship, there are two persons involved and there is this movement from the lover to the beloved. The consummation of this loving relationship is this holy, simple communion where each loses oneself in the other. And the extraordinary thing about our call to holiness is that Jesus loses himself in us. The loving relationship is fully loving on his side too.

Something we've got to be very clear about is that in the response of the Christian life, the response is always from us as a result of the initiative taken by God. That's a very important thing to bear in mind. 'The love I speak of is not our love for God but the love

of the basic religious experience as an awakening, as an enlightenment, and a realisation. This is what we have to say to the world: that within the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, the theology of Trent, we must awaken to the fact that the Lord Jesus prays within us; his Spirit is within us, and he takes us to the Father. And awakening to this is our enlightenment. And this experience of awakening and enlightenment is the basic experience of vitalisation that Jesus came to communicate to us. ■

of our religion for men, so he tells us in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 6:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogue and at the street-corners, for everyone to see them. I tell you this, they have their reward already. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.

Mt 6:5-6

In telling us to pray by ourselves, Jesus is warning against the dangers of ceremonial prayer, of liturgy, which can so easily become mere formalism, mere vanity. What he is saying, if I understand it correctly, is that prayer is inevitably the personal responsibility of each individual. We have to take that responsibility to go to our own private room, to the innermost chamber of our heart. And only in accepting that responsibility, in the direct encounter with one's own self, in the solitude of oneself, will we meet the Father in the secret place. What Jesus is saying is that this meeting of the Father in the innermost chamber of our heart is something that we have to share with others. And liturgical prayer, communal prayer is a group of realised spirits come together to share their joy in their possession of the Lord in their hearts.

So we must understand the dynamic balance that's being set up in the teaching of Jesus. In establishing the Eucharist, and in saying that he would be present where two or three were gathered in his name, he certainly did not forget or forbid community prayer or community worship but, as in every other aspect of his message, Jesus gives primary or permanent importance to direct, personal experience, and to the integrity of the responsible person. What Jesus calls us to is the sense of integrity and the sense of responsibility.

Immediately after establishing this priority, Jesus is shown in Matthew as warning his followers against seeing prayer as a self-centred experience. And it becomes such an experience, that is a self-centred experience rather than a God-centred experience, when

we think of ourselves at the time of our prayer – like those sure of their own goodness, who look down on everybody else; or like the Pharisee praying in the temple thanking God that he was not like other men; or like those who are wholly taken up with their needs and their anxious thoughts about food, drink, clothes. So what Jesus is saying is that there is always this danger we all must recognise, for self-centred prayer; and there's a danger that if you see people go off to their room to pray in the secret chamber of their heart, this might *look* like self-centredness. But Jesus tells us that we must be with our heavenly Father, and during our prayer that is where our attention should be. Here we come to what seems to me to be a most important point: How practically can we solve this question of not being self-centred in our prayer? How can we do it?

It seems to me, reading the Gospels, that the solution of Jesus to avoid this tendency to self-centred prayer is a very simple one of restricting our use of words, because it is in language above all that we express and exhort our self-fascination. And when we allow ourselves to do this in prayer, we inevitably increase the degree of our self-fascination by the spectacle of ourselves addressing the Almighty God and, as it were, holding him entranced in our own personality, holding his attention as we discuss with him our problems or our virtues. So what does Jesus say?

In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say, the more likely they are to be heard. Do not imitate them. Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him. (Mt 6:7-8)

So it seems to me that Jesus is quite clearly discouraging us from multiplying words in our prayer, but rather, encouraging us to use a form of prayer that is consistent with his general warning: 'Unless you turn around and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' (Mt 18:3)

The supreme example Jesus puts before us of thorough simplicity in prayer is the tax collector, who is contrasted with the verbose and self-satisfied Pharisee. The publican or tax collector 'kept his distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but

beat upon his breast, saying, "Oh God, have mercy on me a sinner; oh God, have mercy on me a sinner." It was this man, I tell you, and not the other, who went home acquitted of his sins.' (Lk 18:13-14) As you know, in the Russian Orthodox Church, the Jesus Prayer which is the mantra of the Russian Church, is taken from this Chapter 18 of the Gospel of Luke. The point of the story of the publican tax collector is simply that simple repetitive prayer, born of humility and recognition of the power of God to forgive sin, is what the Lord Jesus puts before us as the ideal. Now Jesus constantly stresses to us that we must pray to the Father; and praying *with him* as he prays to the Father – going to the Father *with him*, *in him*, *through him* – is the whole heart of Christian prayer.

Let me just sum this up. His teaching on prayer is that it is a personal responsibility, a matter of each of us accepting the challenge of being and of discovering unity within ourselves, union with the creator of the universe. Prayer demands our complete trust and simplicity. It requires us to be receptive of the presence of the divine life within us. And again, it is essentially a natural process of growth and development requiring on our part sensitivity, openness, and perseverance.

If we are required to make a complete renunciation of ourselves in order to find our real selves, then we have to understand that Jesus is calling us, above all, to be open to the reality of our creation. This call is a call to an increasing acute attentiveness, of wonder, to the reality of that being. You know Jesus spoke more and more often of the need to sustain this attentiveness, this wakefulness as his own personal crisis drew nearer. The final words of his mission, ministry before his passion: 'Keep awake; for you do not know what day the Lord is to come. Hold yourselves ready therefore, because the Son of Man will come at a time you least expect him.' (Mt 24:42, 44)

If we look at the words of Jesus about the absolute demand of the kingdom, and we look at our own personal responsibility that he places on us to make this pilgrimage ourselves, and as we look at his constant call to wakefulness, it seems that Jesus is the guru in the full tradition of the Eastern masters too, who constantly speak