

Centred in Stillness

Some Thoughts for Christian Meditation

Bolton Christian Meditation Group
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“Meditation is the missing dimension of much Christian life today. It does not exclude other types of prayer and indeed deepens reverence for the sacraments and scripture.” Laurence Freeman O.S.B.”

Meditation helps us to know ourselves, and to know that whatever we may think of ourselves we are loved by God who we find in the silent centre of our soul. Accepting ourselves as beloved, leads us to the deep knowledge that all of creation is loved in the same way - unconditionally. And that we are one.

So instead of our daily practice of silence leading us to a way of seclusion and detachment from our neighbour and the World, it draws us deep into its centre where the voices of all who suffer are heard - the love we are immersed into spreads out from us as rays from a prism, healing, and restoring where ever it is needed.

This little booklet draws from a rich source of our Christian heritage and has provided food for our spirit: Water from the well of life.

Sheila Wrigley
Bolton Christian Meditation Group.

Editor's Notes.

The Bolton Meditation Group has been meeting regularly for five years. We follow John Main's teaching on meditation. That is, when we are silent, we use a sacred word or phrase, which we call a mantra. This we recite attentively and interiorly while meditating.

It has become our custom for various members to lead the meeting and choose a reading that will help to focus the meditation. In this short booklet a selection of these readings are offered, which it is hoped, will be useful to others. Some of the readings are longer than others and a few are shorter. Occasionally a prayer or short reading is included for use at the end of the meditation. The members of the group come from all the main Christian Churches and over the years some members have gone on to found other groups. Where it is possible the source of each reading is noted either as a distinct citation, including book title and page, or as a general reference to the author or authors. In some cases the text itself indicates the author.

The content of each reading often reflects the interests of the member who contributes. The readings in this booklet are arranged in three broad groupings, beginning with a selection from the Carmelite tradition of spirituality. A second grouping features a number of readings taken from the writings of Fr John Main OSB as these remind us of what we are about. Indeed, his writings flow through the booklet. His fellow Benedictines, Fr Laurence Freeman and Fr Henri Le Saux are also included here. The final group of readings presents other voices whose teaching on prayer we have found helpful.

The readings resonate with the great themes of Christian meditation and, hopefully, provide an enduring reflection on the meaning, purpose, nature and reality of meditative prayer.

And they show that it is alive in Bolton.

Frank Evans
Bolton Christian Meditation Group.

~Ruth Burrows. Carmelites .

Ruth Burrows is a Carmelite nun at Quidenham in Norfolk: Ruth speaks plainly and she has written books to help her nuns to fully realise their vocation. It is not easy for people to understand the vocation of a life given completely to waiting on God, especially in these times, when actions and good works and being seen to be 'doing good', counts for so much.

'Carmelites have no external work (they are an enclosed order). It is their faith-informed conviction that a life given wholly to God is the most effective work they can do. But, it is no easier to understand for a nun than it is for us. A nun for whom God matters supremely and who is also deeply concerned for others is keenly aware that love for God is inseparable from love of the neighbour. So it demands constant reaffirmation of faith in her own vocation, if she is to resist the temptation to compensate in some way.

It might not be so difficult to accept, if one had the sense of doing one's own job well, of being a successful pray-er! But this is unlikely. So what happens if they feel they do not pray, that their prayer is hardly prayer, so poverty-stricken it is, so lacking in all comforting feedback, and all sentiment?

How often one hears the anxiety voiced by the nuns, 'I feel I do nothing for God. As a person vowed to a life of prayer, I am a failure,' and so forth.'

'Now this', says Ruth Burrows,' is where I believe we touch the very heart of our vocation in the Church; the point where it bears witness to the truth that all must come from God, that all is pure gift and that as human beings we are there only to receive Love, to be 'done unto' in gracious mercy and love. It is this way that we glorify the pure, totally self-giving love of God.'

Ruth Burrows goes on to say –

'A Carmelite is called to live out of this human vocation- the same vocation as all Christians have but in an absolute way, becoming a glad receiver of all that comes to her with no spiritual claim, every reassurance must come from the self. It is no easy vocation.

She recalls how, as a young Religious, 'suffering acutely from the feeling that as a Carmelite I was an utter failure, having nothing whatever to offer to God, I gradually perceived this to be precisely what the vocation is about, its very heart. I was to receive and to believe I had received without sensing it - I was to accept to have nothing to give, to live always with empty hands. My giving could only be in allowing God to give.'

This is not a lovely spiritual ideal, but an experienced reality that can be loved and must be loved because it opens ourselves and the world to the purifying, transforming, love of God.' *Ruth Burrows*

Is this not what we as Meditators - Christian Meditators - are attempting to do in a little way for half an hour twice a day, day after day ? We wait: expecting nothing in return other than to be available for our God to do unto us.

~The Father speaks one Word who is his son.

This word he speaks always in eternal silence. In that silence our Soul must listen – and will hear. *St John of the Cross.*

John Main writes that when we come to meditate, 'we go beyond thoughts, even holy thoughts' because 'Meditation is concerned not with thinking but with being..' By being patient in silence and stillness, in whatever time we have and being attentive to our mantra, we are doing our 'feeble search for him' while ' He does His mighty search' for us. (*Sister Wendy Beckett*) In this way, we are listening with our hearts, encompassed by 'the mystery of God in its fullness' which 'is both inside and outside us, within and without, like the air which surrounds us and penetrates into the tiniest hollow of our lungs.' (*Henri Le Saux OSB*)

But, we say, what if I haven't enough time, what if I am not feeling up to all this ? It doesn't matter. The great teachers of Prayer tell us that all God needs is our desire and He will find us. (*Sister Wendy Beckett*)

~Integrity

It often seems as if we rush through life at such high speed while in our heart there is the essential interior flame of being. Our rushing often brings it to the point of extinction. But when we sit down to meditate, in stillness and simplicity, the flame begins to burn brightly and steadily. As we abandon thinking in terms of success and self-importance, the light of the flame helps us to understand ourselves and others in terms of light, warmth and love.

The mantra leads us to this point of stillness where the flame of being can burn bright. It teaches us what we know, but frequently forget, that we cannot live a full life unless it is grounded on some underlying purpose. Life has an ultimate significance and value that is only really discovered in the still steadiness of being, which is our essential rootedness in God.

Rooted in God, we must be open to the love that redeems us from illusion and shallowness. We must live out of that personal infinite holiness which we have as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Discovering that the same Spirit that created the universe dwells in our hearts, and in silence is loving to all, is the purpose of every life.

John Main OSB, Word Made Flesh (London: DLT, 1993), pp. 55-56.

~It is our birthright to live in the presence of the Almighty.

Fr. Henri Le Saux OSB was a French Benedictine Monk, who lived in India in a hermitage at Gyansu in the Himalayas, near the source of the Ganges. His teaching was that it is our birth-right to live in the presence of the Almighty. And that this should be as natural for a Christian as to breathe the air which surrounds him.

‘Entrance into prayer is an act of faith. By saying that, we mean not that when we think of God, we have to believe that he is, but that we believe he is everywhere, he is in everything; he is the origin and the source of everything, the end and the consummation to which all creatures are moving. Praying is simply believing that we are in the “mystery of God”, that we are encompassed by that mystery, that we are really plunged into and immersed in it – “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17.28) – that the mystery of God in its fullness is both inside and outside us, within and without, like the air which surrounds us and penetrates into the tiniest hollows of our lungs.’

Henri Le Saux O.S.B ASHISHIKANANDA (The Holy One) p 11

~ In silence you discover that you are loved

Last week Henri Le Saux OSB reminded us that 'it is our birthright to live in the presence of the Almighty'. This should be as natural to us, he added, as the air we breathe.

When we meditate we are in this ancient tradition of prayer. John Main writes that, 'As St John tells us, no man has ever seen God, but we can all experience God whenever and wherever we encounter love. Jesus continues to communicate his presence to us in every way that people relate to one another in love. Because at the centre of our being meditation leads us into the experience of love, it makes us more loving people in our ordinary lives and relationships. You discover in the silence that you are loved and that you are lovable. It is the discovery that everyone must make in their lives if they are going to become fully themselves, fully human. The first step in personhood is to allow ourselves to be loved. To know ourselves to be loved is to have the depths of our own capacity to love opened up.'

John Main: The Joy of Being p48

Leaving Needs Behind.

[Meditation] isn't a call to follow a way of saintly perfection. It isn't a call to be a hero or a genius, nor even a call to be extraordinary in any way. It is a call to be the person you are and to take the time, whether it is five years or fifty years, to be who you are, the person Jesus has loved by laying down his life.

So Fr John would point to the Gospel and would say that the teaching of meditation is the teaching of the Gospel. He says in *Word Into Silence*, "the whole of the teaching of Cassian on prayer is based on the Gospel." And he quotes Jesus' words: "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."

There is a great demand in the words of Jesus, "your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him." It is the summons to be silent. It is the invitation to trust. Silence in meditation is the supreme expression of our trust

in God, just as in any human relationship it can be the supreme expression of personal trust. From the experience of meditation we know that the demand at first evokes something frightening and almost impossible to understand: Leave your needs behind.

And how can we leave our needs behind? Our need for personal fulfilment, our need for sympathy, our need for understanding, our need for recognition, our need for every essential kind of human affirmation. Leaving those needs behind seems to us to be almost impossibly negative until we understand that hanging on to them is the sure way of remaining in need. Hanging on to our needs is a denial of the fullness that we are offered in the present moment. When they are clung to, those needs are really not needs but desires.

How do we let go of them? Meditation tells us very simply. We let go of them by not asking for them, by not petitioning for them, at least not in an egotistical way. Not asking for me. Every prayer of the Mass is a petition, but it is the need of the community in which each has transcended or is transcending his own isolated desires and egoism. When we pray for the coming of the Kingdom we are, as it were, throwing our own isolated needs and desires behind us and sacrificing ourself to the Kingdom, as a preparation for communion. Needs are also left behind by ceasing to think about them. That perhaps is the greatest challenge: to turn away even from thinking about our needs, in the trust that the Kingdom is established, and that its fullness is realized to the degree that we trust. If only we can trust.

Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, Light Within (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 69-71.

And after Meditation...

The sacrifice of Jesus accomplishes the Father's eternal plan to unite humanity with divinity, to bring alive and deify the depths of human nature, of the universe, of being. Never again should we be alone, shut out or lost. When we are in shame or despair, and there seems no way out, Christ is waiting for us in silent love.

Olivier Clement, The Roots Of Christian Mysticism (London: New City, 1995), p. 45.

Let the soul leave itself in the hands of God.

Wait upon God with loving and pure attentiveness, working no violence on yourself lest you disturb the soul's peace and tranquillity. God will feed your soul with heavenly food since you put no obstacle in his way.

The soul in this state must remember that if it is not conscious of making progress, it is making much more than when it was walking on foot, because God himself is bearing it in his arms. Although outwardly it is doing nothing, it is in reality doing more than if it were working, since God is doing the work within it. And is it not remarkable, that the soul does not see this, for our senses cannot perceive that which God works in the soul.

Let the soul then leave itself in the hands of God and have confidence in him. Let it not trust itself to the hands and works of others, for if it stays in God's care it will certainly make progress.

St John of the Cross (1542 – 91)

~Be still and know that I am God.

We have been talking about Carmelite Spirituality, in particular that of two great Carmelite saints Teresa and John of the Cross. The early Carmelites were hermits in the Holy Land. [Well of Elijah] Later they migrated to other parts of Europe to escape persecution and adopted the mendicant way of life. Carmelites had no particular founder; Elijah and Mary became their inspiration.

Carmelites were filled with a deep conviction, which lies at the heart of their spirituality: God is alive! God is present! God is with us! In the words of the Prophet Elijah, 'God lives in whose presence I stand'. Both Teresa and John of the Cross were grounded in this vision.

'Carmel stands for the intimate encounter which God brings about between the person and God in the midst of all that is most ordinary in life' [No place for visions, ecstasies etc.] Teresa, in her reform emphasised that Prayer, the heart of the Rule, was to be the heart of her reform-'Prayer must be the

foundation on which this house is built.' 'Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the Rule.'

John of the Cross : ' We must remember that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is hidden in essence and presence, in the inmost being of the soul...' [Sp Cant 1.6-7]

John Main began to teach people a very simple way of finding silence that could lead to contact with God. The repetition of the mantra leads us into a period of silence, of emptiness and inner 'poverty of the spirit'. John Main spoke about returning to the poverty of the mantra when other thoughts intrude themselves so that we can be truly still and be open to be absorbed in God.

Una Kroll, in her talk at Tabor, reminded us of this-

'I want to remind you of another quotation from John Main: 'In our experience of silence to which our repeated act of faith leads us, we know prayer not as observing God or setting a trap for God, but total absorption in God. To pray means to leave the self behind and find our self absorbed in God. It means that the journey from self is a penetration into the infinite mystery of God.....The ground of our being and consciousness are pervaded by the mind of Christ, whose love unites to himself.'

Una then ended her talk with these words: 'It is He who acts and draws us to Himself, not we who struggle to find Him. He finds us. We just need to wait and respond.'

The words of St Teresa and St John of the Cross are taken from the Carmelite website : www.carmelite.org.uk. The Rev Una Kroll's words are taken from the text of her talk to North West Meditators.

~God is the centre of my soul.

St Paul wrote (Rom 8:26) that 'we do not know how to pray, but the spirit prays within us.' What this means in the language of our own day is that before we can pray we first have to learn how to become still, to become attentive. Only then can we enter into loving awareness of the Spirit of Jesus deep within our heart. Meditation...is the prayer of silence, the place where direct contact with Christ can occur, once the never-ceasing activity of the mind has been stilled. In meditation, we go beyond words, thoughts, images, to the presence of God within.

John Main

~Commitment to Simplicity.

Meditation is a way of breaking through from a world of illusion into the pure light of reality. The experience of meditation is that of becoming anchored in Truth, in the Way and in Life. In the Christian vision that anchor is Jesus. He reveals to us that God is the ground of our being, that none of us has any existence outside of him. . . .The great illusion that most of us are caught in is that we are the centre of the world and that everything and everyone revolves around us. . .

But in meditation we learn that this is not true. The truth is that God is the centre and every one of us has being from his gift, from his power and from his love. . . . Meditation is the great way of liberation. We are liberated from the past . . . and become open to our life in the present moment . . . We learn that we are because God is, [and that] simply being is our greatest gift.

John Main

Lost and found

There is always a danger of your practice growing stale and weary, particularly if you are trying too hard. It is easy to forget that you are engaged in an affair of the heart.

Sometimes its repetitive nature does mean that without realising it, distractions have overcome you; the heart's focus has become lost in words, [Which] have become wooden. Your practice, which seemed so life giving has withered to a meaningless noise of the mind with only commitment keeping you to it.

It may be that you need rest.

And then gently focus again, allowing your heart's imagination to be rekindled, until you find that a practice, which had become so lifeless is transformed once again into an Epiphany as you meet the miracle of yourself returning: lost and found.

Beyond Words by Patrick Woodhouse.

~The invitation given to every one of us...

All great truths are simplicity itself. We can only know them when we become simple. When we sit down to meditate and begin to say our word, our mantra, we are on our way to that simplicity. We are on our way to the foundation on which our whole being rests. We are on our way to union, union with Jesus. This was and is the inspiration of the words of St Paul:

"Who knows what a person is but that person's own spirit within him? In the same way, only the Spirit of God knows what God is. This is the Spirit that we have received from God, and not the spirit of the world, so that we may know all that God of his own grace has given us." (1 Cor 2:11-12)

That is the invitation given to every one of us so that we may know personally from our own experience all that God of his own grace gives us. The way to that knowledge is the way of faithfulness, a daily faithfulness to our meditation. Faithfully, every morning and every evening of our lives - to turn aside from everything that is passing away; and to be open to the eternal Spirit of God. It is also the way of faithfulness during our meditation, faithfully to say our word, our mantra, from beginning to end, no following of thoughts, and no spinning of phrases or words; just growing in simplicity.

The power by which we do all this is given to us. It is the power of the love of Jesus. As St Paul says "Surely you know that you are God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells." (1 Cor 3:16) In our meditation we seek to be as fully open as we can be in this life to the Spirit of God dwelling within us.

John Main OSB, Moment Of Christ (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 55-57.

~In the secret of my heart teach me wisdom. (Ps 51)

John Main writes that in 'meditation we go beyond thoughts, even holy thoughts. Meditation is concerned not with thinking but with being....' In the silence and stillness of our hearts we do what Sister Wendy Beckett calls 'our feeble search for Him' as we recite our mantra as attentively as we can. 'We learn to be silent by paying attention. Attention brings the centre of our being to full consciousness. It brings us from the past and the future into the present which is gentle and restful.' (Fr Laurence Freeman) What, then, is this 'wisdom' that the psalm says can be taught to us? Part of it is surely that while we are meditating, while we are not actually *doing* anything, 'God's mysterious and silent presence within us' can 'become *the* reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are.'

~Make Nothing Happen

Religion is meaningless if it is confined to external and ritual acts of worship. Liturgy and ritual only have meaning when they are inspired by conversion of heart. This is what we are turning to as we learn to be still. In stillness, awareness matures - that God has revealed himself to humanity in Jesus and that Jesus reveals himself to us- in our heart, by his Spirit. Our life, no less than liturgy, finds meaning when we are as fully open as we can be to this Spirit.

Looked at from the outside, meditation can be thought of as a static condition, one in which you had closed down the doors of perception. But from actual experience meditation is known to be far from a static state and is far better understood as a dynamic awakening to the fullness of our own potential for growth. The expansion of our spirit in the love of Jesus is this fullness. Simplicity, childlike trust and wonder are the ways to realise it. We are not looking for anything to happen, for any insights or wisdom. We are not analyzing any superficial or external phenomena. All this is trivia compared with the knowledge of the Spirit dwelling within us that arises when we turn our minds aside from what is temporal and passing and instead open our hearts to what is enduring: God and God's love for each of us. . . .

It is nothing less than essential to meditate every day. Meditation is to the spirit what food and air are to the body. We must come to peacefulness, serenity and our capacity for true vision if we are to live in the light of God. Again and again the Gospel tells us that that light shines in our hearts. So we need only to be open to it in humility and love

John Main, Word Made Flesh. (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1993), pp. 20-21.

~On prayer: seek and you shall find.

'God wants you to be the fullness of what you could be. You cannot become this if you do not allow Him to enter into you. You do your feeble search for Him, and He will do His mighty search for you. 'Seek and you shall find.' The 'you' God seeks may not be the 'you' of whom you are aware. It is the essential you, the real you, the fullness of your potential. The transformation from one to the other, the realizing of that potential in you, may take a lifetime. Few of us will ever wholly achieve this complete surrender. But all God needs is your desire.

Sister Wendy Beckett, On Prayer p22

~Meditation is about stillness.

Meditation is . . . about stillness. It is like the stillness of a pool of water. The distractions that we have when we begin to meditate are only ripples and currents and eddies that disturb the water. But as you begin to meditate, and stillness comes over you, the depth of the water becomes clearer and clearer in the stillness. The experience of meditation, the experience to which each of us is summoned and of which all of us are capable, is to discover that depth within us which is like a deep pool of water, water of an infinite depth. The marvellous thing about such a pool of water is that when it is still and the sun strikes it, every drop of the water in its infinite depth is like a drop of crystal alive with the light of the sun. That is exactly what we are called to in meditation - to discover the depth of our own spirit and the capacity of our own spirit to be in complete harmony with the God who tells us: "I am the light of the world."

Don't misunderstand this. As I have told you with absolute truth, meditation is simplicity itself. But you do have to be serious in your own commitment to this deep harmony within your own spirit---a harmony that reveals to you the spirit of God within you. We have to be serious. . . .

Fr John Main OSB, Moment of Christ (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 6-7.

And after meditation...

We must maintain great stillness of mind, even in the midst of our struggles. A comparison with the sea may help us. A tranquil sea allows the fisherman to gaze right to its depths. No fish can hide there and escape his sight. The stormy sea, however, becomes murky when it is agitated by the winds. The very depths that it revealed in its placidness, the sea now hides. The skills of the fisherman are useless.

Only the Holy Spirit can purify the mind. . . . So by every means, but especially by peace of soul, we must try to provide the Holy Spirit with a resting place. Then we shall have the light of knowledge shining within us at all times. . . .

St Diadochus, "Treatise on Spiritual Perfection," The Liturgy Of The Hours.

~He knows what He is about

A great deal of the interest in the spiritual life of our time has a psychological origin. People are often interested in what prayer and what meditation can teach them about themselves. It is very easy for people of our generation to see everything in terms of self-improvement, self understanding and so forth. In fact, of course, this fascination that we have for looking at ourselves can be disastrous for the spiritual journey. *John Main, The Door to Silence.*

Rather – In our silence we wait for His word – we surrender to his will, whatever it may be: This week has brought the spiritual life to the forefront by the Pope's visit and the honouring of Cardinal Newman, a man who understood this – this is his prayer and it should be ours too.

'God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission; I may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nought. I shall do some good – I shall do His work. If I am in sickness, my sickness will serve him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me – still He knows what He is about.'

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

~God is the still point at my centre.

We do not know how to pray' wrote St Paul, 'but the Spirit prays within us.' What this means for today is that before we can pray, we first have to learn how to become still, to become attentive. Only then can we enter into loving awareness of the Spirit of Jesus deep within our heart and discover, as Julian of Norwich said, that 'God is the still point at my centre.' Echoing this ancient tradition, John Main teaches that meditation is the prayer of silence, where

we go beyond thoughts, where we pray with the 'heart' rather than the 'head' as we seek the presence of God within each of us. Sister Wendy Beckett writes that being there for God 'is the proof, as it were, of your desire to pray....You are there for God's sake, you are there for him to look on you, to love you, to take his holy pleasure in you.'

'Be still and know that I am God' says the psalmist, for it is in silence and stillness that God finds us.

John Main, Sister Wendy Beckett

~ Finding the desert

'In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.....' (Mk 1.35)

'There is a tendency today for people to say, with greater or less distress, that they have no time for prayer. What they mean is they do not have a peaceful hour, or two peaceful hours, or even three peaceful twenty minutes. If that is the day God has given them, then he awaits their praying hearts under precisely these conditions. They are testing conditions, surely, but never impossible. Most of us can manage a ten minute silence. It may have to be in the lavatory, or in the bath, or in the car, or standing at the station, or when the baby's just gone to sleep. But for most people it is possible. If you can spend it sitting quietly, I rejoice for you. But this concentrated time when you try to put aside all else and simply be there for God is proof, as it were, of your desire to pray. Take these times, poor crumbs of minutes though they be and give yourself to God in them....'

Sister Wendy Beckett: On Prayer p18

Charles De Foucauld greatly loved the desert, and yet he did not go to the desert for these reasons alone. He thought of it also as a route, a route by which he hoped to bring divine charity to men who were abandoned. He chose to live in the desert to serve. It is for this same reason that we, in our vocation, must live in the world, strongly as we may be attracted to the desert and as much as we may need it at some times.

Like so many of our contemporaries, wherever we may be...we suffer all the effects of the weight of modern civilisation, as it accelerates the rhythm of our days. Man today is often spiritually tired, and if it is true that the action of the Holy Spirit is necessary to every Christian, to perfect him in charity, to render him capable of bearing witness to his Christianity on difficult occasions, then it must be said that Christians of today have a most imperative need of the Holy Spirit in their over busy and wearisome lives. The desert is the exterior and sensible sign of this search for God. And it is thus that, living close to people as our vocation requires us to do, we are able, as I have said, to 'join the desert to the crowd.'

The Life and Message of Brother Charles of Jesus. P30

~Live in the Present

Our true home is in the present moment.
 To live in the present moment is a miracle.
 The miracle is not to walk on water.
 The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the
 present moment.

Thich Nhat Hanh—Eastern philosopher

These words....make good sense. It is extraordinary how much time we spend worrying over future possibilities or regretting things from our past lives. We waste huge amounts of precious energy over useless anxiety. No wonder we feel drained and tired so often. We have to ... come to our senses, literally-to what you are currently seeing, hearing, touching. This is the safest and surest place to be. No one can harm you if you abide in the here and now. It is also the only meeting-place between you and the God called *I Am*; the only moment of encounter between our spirits and the Spirit of all life. It is uniquely in the here and now that the pen point of God's love writes on the page of our humanity as the divine drama of the incarnation unfolds.

Daniel O'Leary, Travelling Light p153

~The narrow path

Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing. But everybody knows that this is something that needs to be practiced and learned, in these days when talk – activeness prevails. Real silence, real stillness, really holding one's tongue comes only as the sober consequence of spiritual stillness.

But this stillness before the Word will exert its influence upon the whole day. If we have learned to be silent before the Word, we shall also learn to manage our silence and our speech during the day.

The silence of the Christian is listening silence, humble stillness that may be interrupted at any time for the sake of humility.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

~ Listen with the ear of your heart: some thoughts from Daniel O'Leary.

At a Metro station in Washington DC, during the rush hour, a man started to play the violin. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. Only six people stopped and stayed awhile. He collected \$32. Then he quietly left and the silence took over. In fact the man was a world famous violinist and his violin was worth \$3.5 million. Daniel O'Leary asks : if we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing the best music ever written, how many other things are we missing in the course of our normal day?

Awareness is always about presence. But how often are we present to ourselves and to our environment in a distracted world.....From both within and without, that inner sacred space is continually invaded. We need to learn how to leave the mind and to come to the senses – the threshold of our soul- and listen with our heart, so as to hear the silent music beneath the noisy traffic of our thinking, to catch the divine harmony in everything human.

Along the soul's way we find the only places of encounter between our spirit and the Spirit of all life, between our emptiness and the universal flow of energy. It is the soul's way that we hear and create the unique music that only we can hear and create. It is here that we come home to the God of harmony already within our hearts. 'God is always at home,' Meister Eckhart insisted, 'it is we who take a walk.'

The Tablet 24/04/10

~The quiet mind – a basis of truly ‘knowing’.

If one is to approach God in Silence, the mind must be still and at rest. When it is filled with [many thoughts] it cannot know the one thing that matters...We can only ‘know’ [in this sense] when the mind is quiet and receptive. If only we had this inner tranquillity we would be filled with that void in which all is contained. To be still in complete joy and surrender is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is always wanting to enter our consciousness but we never seem to at home in ourselves to receive Him...

Once the body is stilled in comfort and with reverence, the emotions have to be quietened and the stream of thoughts that traverse and trouble the mind slowly dissipated. To do this is the heart of meditation. It is [done] by filling the mind with one thought or repeated phrase or sound – a Mantra.

To stop analysing and criticising and to flow out in active blessing (which is the heart of rest) is the basis of a real relationship.

Adapted from Martin Israel - Summons to Life

~We come to prayer as the people we are

In our meditation we attempt to make ourselves ‘still’ and with the help of the mantra, to open ourselves to the God that is within us. We are in the tradition in which we quieten our thoughts and pray with our ‘heart’. But we come to prayer as the people we are, each with our own lives with all our own particular concerns.

What can we say about this? Sister Wendy Beckett offers us these thoughts:

‘...None of this matters. It is who you are that God comes to in prayer, and if it is a tired, fractious, despondent man or woman, He still takes you to Himself with infinite love and makes the best of what you can give Him.’ In this way she reminds us that God responds to each of us as we are.

She adds... ‘Sometimes people have told me, ‘I feel too sick to pray’. If you think about it, this is really saying, ‘God cannot come to the sick.’ What is

meant is, 'I feel too sick to feel I am praying' or 'I feel too worried to feel I am praying. How can I pray when all I can think about is my coming operation?' This misunderstands the essence of prayer, which is God's business. You bring yourself in whatever state you are and offer that to God. There may be very little satisfaction in this. All you may be conscious of are your own feelings....but God does not ask us to pass a test of how beautiful our feelings are. He simply wants us to pray.'

Sister Wendy Beckett on Prayer p15

~The Lord is within us and we should be there with him.

Teresa of Avila

Daniel O'Leary tells the story of the little boy, who wandered away from his mother to listen to a scruffy, broken-down old man playing a lonely mouth organ in the cold rain. When his anxious mother found him he said to her, 'How lucky he is to be able to play such beautiful music.' The little girl who had 'such a lovely time' watching the water-lily had a similar experience.(1) Both children were listening with the ears of their heart, just as we try to do when we meditate. Saying the mantra attentively, whatever phrase we use, helps us to be centred in stillness so that we can listen to the Spirit within ourselves.

But how are we with Him? Simply by being ourselves in the stillness and silence of our meditation, for whatever time we can and whenever we can. It is the habit of praying, what Sister Wendy Beckett calls the 'wanting' to pray, that is important. The great spiritual writers tell us that God is always there, like the air that we breathe. Daniel O'Leary puts it this way: 'It is the soul's way that we hear and create the unique music that only we can hear and create. It is here that we come home to the God of harmony already within our hearts.' In our meditation is it not too much to claim that we, too, strive to hear 'such beautiful music' so that we 'can be there with him.'

Daniel O'Leary, Sister Wendy Beckett.

1. God's Hotel by Rev David Wood p101

~**Sunday before Lent.** - Gospel reading Luke 9; 28-36

In this Gospel reading of the Transfiguration, we hear the story of Jesus , Peter ,James and John, going up into a mountain .

They are there on a mountain, a place which is naturally conducive to sublime thoughts, when suddenly Jesus is transformed and for a moment the disciples get to see who Jesus really is as he talks to Moses and to Elijah. The three are discussing all this when suddenly God Himself in the form of a cloud envelopes them and a voice booms from the cloud 'this is my son...listen to him' Quite an experience!

Compare this image of God with the one Elijah –

“The word of the Lord said to Elijah “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountain and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice of calm.

The reality of the voice of God in our lives is usually far less dramatic and we will need to listen out for it if we are going to hear it. Listen for it in the silence. But it is there. Isn't it ... you know it is? It's that “something understood” of which poets have spoken. As Charles Wesley wrote “ From the World of sin and noise, and hurry, I withdraw; For the small and inward voice I wait with humble awe; Silent am I now and still, dare not in Thy presence move; To my waiting soul reveal. The secret of Thy Love

From a sermon given by Prof Kenneth Newport

~When we are ill - Holding it all together

When we are ill our capacity to distinguish between the Voice of the World and the Voice of the Lord becomes more difficult and of course we have our feelings also to contend with.

I awake one day to beautiful weather; look out at the garden and see the trees and listen to the birds singing and my heart breaks with the wonder and its beauty, it makes me speechless. Then I listen to the news or read the papers and it is violence, sorrow, rape, murder, starvation and wholesale suffering. And my heart breaks, speechless. No proper words for it – heartbroken both ways. The oscillation between the extremes can be very fast, immediate; sometimes I feel like I'm spinning in the middle of it all, being blown by a wind one way then the other. And it's hard going. And it is equally very good. Am I just a crazy, mixed up rapidly ageing adult?

Throughout the ages the Wise ones of all faiths will say this is what it is to be fully human. The religious/Christian will say that this is what it is like to be filled by the Holy Spirit of God. This is how it is – how it is meant to be. They say it is the engine of creation fully at work within us.

The oscillation they say is the stuff of happiness. There is no true happiness without somehow holding all this together; the alternative is a running away to different escapes from the mass of life. And to live the oscillation fully as it happens is exactly not to run away. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep – not much let up – Neglect the one and you neglect the other, then the engine starts to falter, to run down.

The wise say rejoice in the beauty of the Earth Rejoice. And equally, accumulate the sorrows as you go, for they need you to reach them from the broken heart of your helplessness. You belong with them and you can help those who have them to lift and carry, though they will never know you. We do not have to understand or measure input and output. Only have faith in ourselves and our immense capacity for loving and giving, so little recognised, so often held back. Be generous. Pour your heart out every way up. It's the surest way to have not only truly broken but truly mended.

God's Hotel by Rev David Wood p184

~Praying with the eye of the heart.

Praying is the disciplined work of learning to 'fix' what has been called 'the eye of the heart' beyond oneself – onto the Mystery and Presence of Christ.

It is extraordinary how, if you persist in steadfast and determined focusing of your mind, gently repeating your word of adoration, a slow process of releasing begins to occur within you. Continue to gently repeat your word in time with your breath and in tune with your heart, until you and your word may even become one.

It is hard work at first, this 'work of God'. But if we persist in it, those things that have restricted and oppressed us – fears, anxieties, worries, neurosis – gradually lose their the power of their grip. They lighten and may even dissolve entirely. A new kind of freedom and peace of the heart is born within.

It is a great gift; and you find you emerge from your practice quietly more alive – and able to act.

Patrick Woodhouse.

~PEACEWORK

Entering the special solitude of prayer is a protest against a world of manipulation, rivalry, suspicion, defensiveness, anger, hostility, mutual aggression, destruction and war. It is a witness to the all-embracing, all-healing power of God's love. By not acting under the pressure of those who live their lives as victims of a series of emergencies, but standing quietly 'with confidence before the Son of Man' (Lk 21:36), we act for peace. It is certainly not an easy act, since everyone around us opposes it. The predominant voice says: Keep moving. Keep wanting. Keep pushing. Keep talking, writing, organising. Be sure to get things done....and done ASAP. But this voice is not the voice of the Lord of peace. Every time Jesus appears to his friends he calms their hearts and minds, saying: 'Don't be afraid, don't be agitated and don't be so doubtful. (Lk24:38)

'When we enter into solitude we will often hear these two voices – the voice of the world and the voice of the Lord – pulling us in two contrary directions. But if we keep returning faithfully to the place of solitude, the voice of the Lord will gradually become stronger and we will come to know and understand with mind and heart the peace we are searching for.'

Prayer, Resistance, Community by Henri Nouwen

Some thoughts from Rowan Williams and others

There comes a time with prayer when it is no longer are you seeing something but are you being seen.

Just as if you are sitting in the Light just being and becoming who you really are.

Gathering in awareness all those sense tentacles those wriggles that lead outward to lay hold of the world, quietly draw them back into the heart...So that you simply become what we are – his creature held within his Hands.'

Rowan Williams

Q. Meister Eckhart said, 'There is nothing so much like God as silence.' What does this mean?

A. Silence is letting what there is be what it is, and in that sense is profoundly to do with God.

We become contemplatives when God discovers himself in us.

Thomas Merton

The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars; fire and lightening and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not: for the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart.

Upanishads

All the thoughts on this page are from the Christian Meditation Newsletter.

~In our silence we wait for his word.

Spiritual writers often use the image of 'childhood' with its echoes of innocence, openness and vulnerability as ways in which we can see the wonder of God and His creation. The child who finds beauty in a flower; the little boy who heard the beautiful music played by an old man on the station platform. My favourite is the little girl who played the lost sheep in the school play. She said she just wanted to be lost and then waited to be found. This very much describes what we do in our meditation: we become 'lost' as it were in our silence and our stillness and wait to be found. Daniel O'Leary writes that the 'grace of openness' flows through all our childhood memories. 'It is in our openness,' he says 'that according to St Thomas Aquinas... we most resemble God.' Meister Eckhart said that 'When God made man; the innermost heart of the Godhead was put into man.'

In meditation, in the silence, stillness and openness of our hearts we wait for such graced moments.

Eternal God, You dwell in us all, like a child in the womb. Let us be attentive to your presence, by listening for your heartbeat.

Inspired by Daniel O' Leary

May all that is unforgiven in you,
Be released.
May your fears yield
Their deepest tranquilities.
May all that is un-lived in you,
Blossom into a future,
Graced with love.

(John O'Donohue)