

*99 short contemplative readings  
for New Zealand meditators*



Edited by Jane Hole



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## Accepting ourselves

Apart from spiritual guidance, we can further our awareness of why we act the way we do by mindfulness of our thoughts, feelings, and sensation... This in turn will gradually silence the inner critic, who loves judging us and berating us worse than anyone else would do. By not judging ourselves, but by being aware of our own propensity to let our negative energy, our woundedness, rule us, we come to self-knowledge and learn to accept ourselves as we are. This will allow us, in turn, to recognise ourselves in others and we will be slower to criticise them. As Maximus the Confessor says 'Interior freedom is not yet possessed by anyone who cannot close his eyes to the fault of a friend, whether real or apparent.' Truly listening, truly paying attention to others, and thus leaving self behind, opens the way to compassion for all. Then progressively we stop justifying ourselves by judging others.

- *Kim Nataraja 'Finding our way back'*

## Achieving peace

Peace is not achieved by rooting out and destroying evil. When we become aware of our vices – anger, pride, greed, lust – the attempt to destroy them easily degenerates into self-hatred.

After all, if we cannot love ourselves why bother to love others? Better than destroying your faults is to work patiently to implant the virtues – a slower and less dramatic work but far more effective. And by avoiding the dangers of religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness, the work creates a more pleasant working personality. Hidden in all our faults – our capacity for evil – there are also the seeds of virtues, many virtues. The terrorist may have had the seed of justice in him before his anger and the delusion that he is the instrument of God's wrath took him over. When we conduct war against ourselves (many of the greatest religious fanatics have been self-

denying) we risk huge collateral damage: in the destruction of our own seeds of virtue. Every kind of violence is a crime against humanity because it deprives the world of unknown goodness.

*- Laurence Freeman OSB WCCM Newsletter*



## A Great Wagon (*middle verse*)

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"  
doesn't make any sense.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep.

- *Jalalruddin Rumi*



## An Ocean for all Beings

So in meditation, we're not demanding that we should experience what we want to experience, but we should be doing [the] work of finding whatever blocks love, reality. And when we find what blocks it, and we stay there humbly - faithful to the work - that wall begins immediately to collapse and we can walk through it. 'There is no reality but God who is an ocean for all beings,' Rumi says. An ocean for all beings, so instead of being locked into our little island of separate identity, we are able to be in God as the ocean which contains all beings.

- *The Brick Wall of the Ego 2* by Laurence  
Freeman OSB



## Anxiety

*[In an earlier part of this reflection Fr Laurence finds in Shakespeare and in Kierkegaard (Danish philosopher) references to people, in a state of anxiety, standing on a cliff either fearing to fall, or wanting to fall, or both.]*

If anxiety grows out of control, it takes over our life. We see it encroaching in our minds like an incoming tide that we cannot turn back. We can't defeat it or escape it: so we must embrace it. This is a life-process. At some points we may have great pitched battles with our anxiety. At others they are slight skirmishes. Little by little, however, we learn to face and embrace it and then to welcome the liberated, transformed energies that flow into us. They empower us for life with unexpected freedom and vitality.

Embracing anxiety is the workload of contemplation. As we accept it, we find, instead of the seesaw of fear and hope, a peace beyond understanding born of simple trust, pure and simple trust in the ground of our being.

. . . The Passion of Christ will teach us to fall or even jump if necessary but, either way, to trust.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Lenten Reflection  
2023*



## Awe and Wonder

I think people who live their lives open to awe and wonder have a much greater chance of meeting the Holy than someone who just goes to church but doesn't live in an open way. We almost domesticate the Holy by making it so commonplace. That's what I fear happens with the way we ritualize worship. I see people come to church day after day unprepared for anything new or different. Even if something new or different happens, they fit it into their old boxes. Their stance seems to be, "I will not be awestruck." I don't think we get very far with that kind of resistance to the new, the Real, and the amazing. That's probably why God allows most of our great relationships to begin with a kind of infatuation with another person—and I don't just mean sexual infatuation, but a deep admiration or appreciation. It allows us to take our place as a student and learner. If we never do that, nothing new is going to happen.

- *Fr Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflections*



## Becoming Simple

Day by day, meditation by meditation, [the] process of simplification proceeds. We become gradually more fearless until, in the joy of being released from the images and memories of desire, we taste total freedom from fear. And then – and even before then – we become of use to others, able to love without fear or desire . . . released to serve the Self which is the Christ within.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB Web of Silence*



## Betrayal

Why do we like secrets so much? Modern literature and movies thrive on mystery and espionage stories; and investigative journalists dig up what people want to hide. Media giants lie to us about privacy, governments try to protect it but online it doesn't exist anymore. Digitally you can construct multiple personalities while thinking you are being authentic. Conspiracy theories mushroom into mass global delusions. Voters often prefer to hear seductive lies and telling the truth is punishable by prison. Perhaps Pilate was right. When Jesus told him he had come into this world to witness to the truth, Pilate replied – either sneering or sadly we don't know – ‘Truth? What is Truth?’ A fear or feeling of betrayal is at the core of our present crisis of truth that, on an unprecedented scale, is pulling up social and personal relations by the roots. Fidelity and commitment are of the essence of the human. When

these are weakened and basic trust is undermined, we are in big trouble, because we collapse into the delusions of the isolated and unchallenged ego.

Betrayal is a disturbingly major theme of Easter but it also exposes the fundamental fidelity at the heart of things. This is reflected in today's gospel, being the fourth in a row to screen Judas as the anti-heroic protagonist in the drama. The Irish call today Spy Wednesday (because he sneaks off to sell Jesus for thirty silver pieces). In the Eastern Church it is called Great and Holy Wednesday. Out of the extreme clash of opposites, love and betrayal, something wonderful and beautiful emerges.

- *Laurence Freeman, Reflection for Wednesday of Holy Week*



## Blessing of Light

May the blessing of light be on you, light without and light within. May the blessed sunshine shine on you and warm your heart till it glows like a great peat fire, so that the stranger may come and warm himself at it, and also a friend.

And may the light shine out of the two eyes of you, like a candle set in the two windows of a house, bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

- *Excerpt from 'Traditional Irish Blessing' in  
Earth Prayers*



## Blessings and Woes

Jesus “came down with them, and stood on a level place” to deliver this sermon. (Luke 6:17, 20-26)

How comforting, Jesus meets us where we are at, in all aspects of our life. This is Jesus’ way of saying ‘There's something you need to understand...’

The blessings and the woes of life are Jesus teaching us how to live as a disciple – a follower of Christ.

- *Christchurch North Catholic Parish Bulletin*  
*February 2022*



## Christian Salvation

I cannot help but think that future generations will label the first two thousand years of Christianity ‘early Christianity’. They will, I believe, draw out more and more of the massive implications of . . . [the] understanding of a Cosmic Christ. They will have long discarded the notion of Christian salvation as a private evacuation plan that gets a select few humans into the next world. The current world has been largely taken for granted or ignored, unless it could be exploited for our individual benefit. Why would people with such a belief ever feel at home in heaven? They didn’t even practice for it! Nor did they learn how to feel at home on earth.

- *Richard Rohr OFM in ‘The Universal Christ’*



## Christ, the truth

It seemed to me certain, and I still think so today, that one can never wrestle enough with God if one does so out of pure regard for the truth. Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms.

— *Simone Weil*



## Come

Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer,  
worshipper, lover of leaving. It doesn't matter. Ours  
is not a caravan of despair. come, even if you have  
broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet  
again, come, come.

— *Jalaluddin Rumi*





## Community Chosen for us

The people we walk through the desert with, feel as if they have been chosen for us. When a monastic community decides to admit a new member, it is not just on the basis of their being good company and having a lot to offer. It is somewhat like an arranged marriage. There has to be personal compatibility but there is a deeper sense of destiny at work. The closeness of members of a community, over time and through trials, grows in a common sense of each and all together, being called to follow the same way. It is rooted in a very personal response and yet develops a common mind and purpose.

- *Laurence Freeman, Lenten Reflection 2021*



## Compassion - the First Fruit of Attention

Attention purifies our hearts and changes the world. We can see this because our own personal afflictions are blessedly relieved if someone genuinely gives us their attention when we need it most. Compassion is the first fruit of attention. It is the life that flows from the death of selfishness. . . . Listening to the mantra with attention gradually reduces the frequency and volume of our disruptive thoughts and impulses. It resharpenes what the ego blunts. We come to say the mantra, to sound it and to listen to it with finer, more subtle and more whole-hearted attention. It aligns us on that frequency of the Holy Spirit that runs through every instant of time and every cell of life. In its silence and stillness is our strength.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB*



## Denial

Denial is a deeply under-underestimated as a state...  
 Denial is an ever present and even splendid thing  
 when seen in the light of its merciful and elemental  
 powers to cradle and hold an identity until it is ready  
 to move on.

. . . Denial is a beautiful transitional state that every  
 human being inhabits before they are emancipated  
 into the next, larger context and orphaned, often  
 against their will, from their old and very familiar  
 home.

. . . Denial is ever-present and unavoidable in a  
 human life . . . a necessary dynamic, so that the  
 overpowering elements of a waiting, terrifying  
 universe be held for now, over the horizon. Denial  
 belongs to us all and should not be given away  
 lightly.

Denial can be a prison if inhabited in a concrete and unmoving way, but denial is also a necessary stepping-stone and a compassionate foundation for viewing those unable to take the next courageous step.

To live in denial is to be in very good company. Denial is the crossroads between perception and readiness; to deny denial is to invite powers into our lives we have not yet readied ourselves to meet.

- *David Whyte, from 'Consolations'*



## Do not expect fireworks

Do not expect fireworks in mantra-based meditation. Most days are very quiet. Every now and then there might be some insight or awareness that is important and sets a direction. However, know that the consistent practice brings a profound openness to others and a willingness to risk for the common good.

- *A quote on the Center for Action and Contemplation website from Simone Campbell, a member of a group called 'Nuns on the Bus'*



## Enlightenment

This idea of enlightenment as some kind of goal we have to achieve is a very deceptive one until we see what the mystical tradition tells us, that there is only one enlightenment. As John Main, Abhishiktananda, and others have said, there's only one enlightenment and we all enter into that. And that is the mind of Christ, the enlightenment of Christ. So it's not my enlightenment, it's not me getting a sudden revelation. There are if you like, temporary enlightenments that happen, experiences that come for a certain time, maybe a few moments, maybe a few days, maybe a few weeks, where we feel penetrated by and immersed in the consciousness of the Spirit, but then that as a separate experience will fade after a while.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB. Enlightenment*



## Enough

The Gospel of Luke . . . offers a vivid image of a way of being together that radically challenges the ‘inevitability’ of scarcity. When Jesus feeds the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes he’s not pulling off a dazzling piece of street magic. A contemplative reading of the story receives it as an assertion that there is always enough – if we are prepared to slow down and be in right relationship with our fellow humans. He gets them to sit down ‘in groups of fifty or so’ and they *share* with one another.

- *Jim Green in ‘Contemplating Earth’*



## Essence to essence

When we truly listen, we connect from essence to essence – we honour one another; in truly listening to the teaching we honour our teachers. Meditation too is a way of obedience, of truly listening with the ear of the heart to the inner voice – the Spirit; in so doing we are led to the mystery of God, which, St Paul discloses, means ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory to come’.

- *Kim Nataraja in WCCM Weekly Teachings*





## Essentially prayer is listening

Prayer is the primary occupation for life in the monastery. While there is a conversational component with God, essentially prayer is listening to the Word of God. It requires an attitude of openness so that God can be present in the core of our being, knowing what is needful for our own healing and that of those people we hold in our hearts. If one is really detached from everything and truly oriented towards God by desire, there is no need of words. God interprets the intensity of our love and the urgency of our thirst for the good of all others. The task of prayer includes offering ourselves and all persons to God.

- *From christdesert.org, the website of the Abbey of Christ in the Desert, New Mexico*



## Everyone and Everything Belongs

In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), Jesus tells of a man by the side of the road waking up in enemy territory, [bandit-infested territory] realizing that he has been loved by the very one who is supposed to hate him and whom he is supposed to fear. Could this be everybody’s awakening? Could this be an accurate image of discovering God and truth? Jesus is clearly presenting the foreign Samaritan as an image of God. He ends the shocking parable by saying, “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37).

The human task, then, is the very *imitation of God*, which seems almost unthinkable. God, the one that history has been taught to fear, is in fact the utter Goodness that enfolds us and creates a safe and nonthreatening universe for us—a renewed universe that we can now pass on to others. For Jesus, there

are no postures, group memberships, behaviors, prayer rituals, dietary rules, asceticism, or social awareness that, of themselves, transform us or make us enlightened, saved, or superior. There are no contaminating elements or people to expel or exclude. These answers are exposed as inadequate ... when goodness is exposed as the divine field of action. Everyone and everything belongs.

- *Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflections*



## Everything you need will be given to you

[In *Word into Silence* the heart of the] teaching is this insight that John Main gives us, that there is a wonderful challenge, a wonderful adventure, and a wonderful opportunity that each one of us is offered and that in meditating we accept that offer, we accept that invitation to leave self behind and find ourselves in God, in love. And, as John Main said to me before he died, ‘everything you need will be given to you’. We don’t have to feel or fear that this is an impossible task or something beyond our ability. We do it as best we can, that’s what faith is, and if we’re faithful to it. Of course we will do it imperfectly because we are human beings and we’re wounded human beings. So of course we will do it imperfectly, but if we do it faithfully then everything we need to complete it will be given to us.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB The Brick Wall of the Ego 2*

## Faithful Repetition

. . . meditation is an act of faith. It's a repeated act of faith of course if we meditate seriously, regularly, and it becomes an act of love. What begins in faith turns into love through repetition. Keep repeating something faithfully, and if it is something positive, if it is other-centred, it will lead to love. If you keep repeating something that leads to isolation and fear, then clearly this is not an act of faith, it's an act of addiction or an act of compulsion. There are different kinds of repetition. There's faithful repetition and there's mechanical, involuntary, or compulsive repetition. Meditation is repetitive, but it is faithfully repetitive.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB Daily Wisdom*



## Fear and Faith

... the foundation stone of freedom from fear is that of faith: a faith that, despite all worldly appearances to the contrary, causes me to believe that I live in a universe that makes sense. To me, this means a belief in a Creator who is all power, justice, and love; a God who intends for me a purpose, a meaning and a destiny to grow, however little and halting, toward his own likeness and image.

- *Bill Wilson, founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in a 'Grapevine article' 1962*



## Fear and love

The difference between the barbaric world and a civilised world is that barbarism thrives on fear. Civilisation thrives on a love that gives birth to vigour, energy, vitality, creativity. Barbaric energy is negative; its main thrust is destructive, and its principal art is war. The principal art of the Christian life is peace.

Our commitment to meditation is our openness to this piece of God's redemptive love: our acceptance of it, our abandonment of self-fixation and our commitment to self-giving . . . The root-function of the gospel, which is really the only root, is to expel fear, to pluck it out by the roots so that we can go deeper and deeper into a fearless heart and there encounter profoundest love.

- *John Main OSB 'The Heart of Creation'*



## Fond of our Problems

We are much fonder of our problems, and the things that limit us, than we might think, much more attached to the pains and the crosses we carry than we need to be.

It seems to us that we cannot let them go, that we carry them with us wherever we go. But when we step over the boundaries of our egoism, of our fear of life and our fear of expanding beyond ourselves, we do let our limitations go, and we discover that our life is not restricted by those boundaries, any more than our capacity to be alive is ultimately restricted by our problems.

But to step over our problems requires courage, which is essentially simplicity of spirit. It seems absurd that we should need courage to accept a gift; and yet it is understandable, because in accepting the gift we lose ourselves, for we transcend ourselves.

- *Adapted from Laurence Freeman's 'Light Within'*



## Forgiveness and compassion are the very structure of reality

...we learn, through the combination of our own experience and the teaching and the wisdom of the tradition of the enlightened minds of the past. We learn that the only morality is the morality of love, that forgiveness and compassion are not signs of weakness or compromise or condescension, but are the very structure of reality. This is the God who is equally loving to good and bad alike. 'Love is from God,' St John says. 'Everyone who loves is a child of God.'

- *Laurence Freeman OSB from Aspects of Love 3, Meditation Talks*



## Fragility of Goodness

Martha Nussbaum once wrote a book with the incomparable title, *The Fragility of Goodness*. Once you've heard the phrase, it stays lodged in the memory. Often enough the good *seems* terribly fragile. That is when it matters to walk, not by sight but by faith, believing firmly in the supreme Goodness that bears all things.

In the *Dialogue*, Catherine of Siena heard the Lord say: 'I wish to act mercifully towards the world and to provide in all circumstances for my creature endowed with reason. Ignorant man, though, turns into death what I give for the sake of life; thus he makes himself cruel to himself. I always provide, and I tell you that what I have given man is highest providence. With providence I created him; and when I looked into myself, I fell in love with the beauty of my creature.'

- *Eric Varden, Bishop of Trondheim, Norway*

(found on coramfratribus.com 'coram fratribus')

means something like 'in the presence of the believing community')

## Love named or not

John Main's theology breathes through the model of relationship expressed in the Christian understanding of the Trinity. Here God is seen as a relationship, communion, and community. Not an anthropomorphic God. Not God as a philosophical idea to be proven or debated. Or as a magical ego projection offering false consolation. But [God is] all that every human being seeks and that cannot be reduced to biology, neurotransmitters or even to desire. We seek love, named or not. Therefore, we see God whether we believe or not. "Whoever loves lives in God and God lives in them". The ego will fail to understand this because it wants to possess what it seeks. . . . Whoever truly seeks will find but then, as truly, will lose, in myriad ways, in each phase of life. God is the human quest that gives meaning to life whether or not we believe. Religion wants us to 'believe'. God just wants us to love.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB*



## God loves imperfect things

Life can't be based on what is passing; it can't be based on transitory images. Instead, we have to base it on the lasting truth, on the truth of who we are, on the truth of this creation, which God says is "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

Our problem seems to consist in the fact that we're convinced of *not* being good. And we need a great deal of trust to believe God's pronouncement that everything God created is very good—even in its imperfect state. We seem to believe that only perfect things are lovable. Yet the Gospels say very clearly that God loves imperfect things, which is really everything! Perfection is invariably our own self-created notion, manufactured largely in our own thinking mind or by our culture; thus, it is both delusional and, finally, self-defeating—as well as a major enemy and obstacle to loving what is right in front of us.

- *Richard Rohr OFM – Daily reflections*

## Goodness exposed

The absolute religious genius of Jesus is that he utterly refuses all debt codes, purity codes, religious quarantines, and the searching for sinners. He refuses the very starting point of historic religions. He refuses to divide the world into the pure and the impure, much to the acute disappointment of almost everybody—then and now. Jesus is shockingly *not* upset with sinners. This is a shock so total that most Christians, to this day, refuse to see it. He is only upset with people *who do not think* they are sinners: these denying, fearful, and illusory individuals are the actual blockage. They are much more likely to hate and feel no compunction. Formerly, religion thought its mission was to expel sin and evil. . . Through Jesus, we learn that sin lies in the very act of expelling. There is no place to expel it to. We have met the enemy, and the enemy is *us*. We either carry and transform the evil of human history as our own problem, or we increase its efficiency and power by hating and punishing it “over there.”

- *Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflections*



## Hope

Beneath the “upbeat” kind of hope that parts the sea and pulls rabbits out of hats, this other hope weaves its way as a quiet, even ironic counterpoint.

We see, it, for example, toward the end of the book of Habakkuk when, at the conclusion of a long litany of doom, the prophet suddenly exclaims - out of nowhere, it seems:

Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,

he enables me to go to the heights.

(Habakkuk 3:17-19)

Now that is quite a reversal! The outcome sounds about as bad as it can get: no crops, no flocks, no food - a likely sentence of starvation in this desert land. And yet Habakkuk's response is joy and strength. Not only does he vow to keep going, his survival does not even sound like a dreary, stoic sort of endurance. Instead, the prophet speaks from a lightness that seems to come flooding in upon him despite all the hopelessness of his situation. There is a spring to his step - "like the feet of a deer" - and "his path leads upward, toward the heights."

- *Cynthia Bourgeault 'Mystical Hope -  
Trusting in the Mercy of God'*



## Hope in a Time of Crisis

Christianity can help us realize that death and resurrection are part of the evolutionary path toward wholeness; letting go of isolated existence for the sake of deeper union. Something dies but something new is born—which is why the chaos of our times is, in a strange way, a sign of hope; something new is being born within. Out of chaos, a star is born. Breakdown can be break through if we recognize a new pattern of life struggling to emerge.

- *Ilia Delio in a Newsletter from The Omega Center, entitled 'Hope in a Time of Crisis'*





## How to Pray

You cannot pray if you are clutching social status, or being better than others, or maintaining conflict with anyone. Jesus said that's what the hypocrites do. *Do not be like them*, he emphasised. *First be reconciled*, says Jesus. In prayer, silence and stillness are always appropriate, waiting is necessary, attention has priority . . . whoever we are. It is what Brother Lawrence called the Practice of the Presence of God, and it is never a smart idea to arrive with a personal agenda, a shopping list, or to imagine God is in the hurry we are.

But perhaps what we come to eventually, grown-up as it were, is expressed by C S Lewis: *I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out from me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.*

- Ross Miller 'A Radiance of God's Presence'



## How to say the mantra

We should see the mantra without impatience, without force or any intention of violence. The purpose of the mantra is not to block out thoughts. It is not a jamming device. If thoughts attack us while we are meditating we turn the other cheek. In saying the mantra gently we learn from him who is gentle and humble of heart . . .

Our lives will, day by day, become the commentary on our prayer. Our prayer will then no longer consist in endlessly commenting on our lives. We will ourselves permanently have become prayer. . . .

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Living in the moment of Christ*



## How we Inhabit our Vulnerability

The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate . . . our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully or conversely as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence but never bravely and completely attempting to enter . . .

- *David Whyte, in 'Consolations'*



## If you dare

The contemplative life has nothing to tell you  
except to reassure you  
and say that if you dare to penetrate your own  
silence  
and dare to advance without fear  
into the solitude of your own heart . . .  
you will truly recover the light and capacity  
to understand what is beyond words  
and beyond explanation  
because it is too close to be explained

- *Thomas Merton OCSO, 'The Monastic  
Journey'*



## Implanting virtue

The first step in implanting the virtues that will eventually overpower vices is to establish the foundational virtue of deep and regular prayer. Through this silent rhythm of prayer, wisdom slowly penetrates our mind and our world. Wisdom is the universal power that brings good out of evil. As the book of Wisdom says: ‘the hope for the salvation of the world lies in the greatest number of wise people’. The wise know the distinction between self-knowledge and self-fixation, between detachment and hardness of heart, between correction and cruelty. There are no rules for wisdom. Rules are never universal. But virtue is.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB WCCM Newsletter*



## Inner peace flows into the outer world

When the field of vision has been unified, the inner being comes to rest, and that inner peaceableness flows into the outer world as harmony and compassion.

- *Cynthia Bourgeault in 'The Wisdom Jesus'*



## Justice and shalom

Restorative justice aligns with the heart of God. It supports that justice is primarily relational rather than individual. In the Old Testament, justice and sin were both relational realities, and justice was not about upholding individual rights but protecting the well-being of communities. . .

This rightness of relationships on every level is known as shalom, which is juxtaposed to the state's understanding of justice. Shalom calls Christians to view and pursue justice in the light of God's original intent. It summons us to live within the confines of covenantal community, where we actively pursue communal flourishing, consider the interests of others (particularly 'the least of these') and prioritise the restoration of righteous relationships in the face of harm. Crime is never merely an individual

breaking the law; it is always a communal transgression that fractures shalom.

God's justice is restorative and reconciling as opposed to retributive and isolating. Our criminal justice system quarantines people who cause harm, which subsequently harms them through punitive measures and dehumanising conditions. Theologically, restorative justice acknowledges that divine justice entails people being reconciled to God, each other, the community, and themselves. . .

- *Dominique DuBois Gilliard*





## Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness. . .

- *Naomi Shihad Nye*



## Letting go of the false self

In our zeal to become the landlords of our own being, we cling to each achievement as a kind of verification of our self-proclaimed reality. We become the center and God somehow recedes to an invisible fringe. Others become real to the extent they become significant others to the designs of our own ego. And in this process the ALL of God dies in us and the sterile nothingness of our desires becomes our God. . . .

Merton makes clear that the self-proclaimed autonomy of the false self is but an illusion. . . .

‘My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the reach of God’s will and God’s love—outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion.’

- *James Finley*



## More Than Enough

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of  
everything,

Please help us to love in our very small way

What You love infinitely and everywhere.

We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer

And that will be more than enough,

Because in reality every thing and every one is  
connected,

And nothing stands alone. . .

We offer our prayer together with all the holy names  
of God,

We offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord,

Amen.

- *Theme for Richard Rohr's 2022 meditations:  
Nothing Stands Alone*



## My back is turned to him

My back is turned to him,  
I have been told that he forgives me,  
but I will not turn  
and have the forgiveness,  
even though I feel the eyes on my back.  
But God does not give up:  
for he takes my head between his hands  
and turns my face to make him smile at him.

\*

He has taken a pair of human hands  
with which to turn our stiff-necked heads,  
and bring our eyebeams  
into line with his own.

- *Austen Farrer, quoted by Esther de Waal*



## Mystery

A mystery is something we encounter but that awaits exposure and interpretation. We feel we are awakening *in the mystery* as we may sometimes become awake in a dream. Hidden in the story we are entering, there are many archetypes. If we can listen to the story subtly, these will help us approach the roots of consciousness; and we will sense an interior structure of meaning emerging, rather than an explanation we are imposing. We will experience the kind of meaning that is a deep connection and resonance, engaging with our own most intimate life-experience, incomplete but fulfilling. We *are* the story we tell about ourselves but *what* we tell depends greatly on *who* we are telling it to, and how they listen and then the connection created with them.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Reflection for Palm Sunday 2023*

## New Year Prayer

God of all time, help us enter the New Year quietly,  
thoughtful of who we are to ourselves and to others,  
mindful that our steps make an impact  
and our words carry power.

May we walk gently.

May we speak only after we have listened well.

Creator of all life,

help us enter the New Year reverently,  
aware that you have endowed

every creature and plant, every person and habitat  
with beauty and purpose.

May we regard the world with tenderness.

May we honor rather than destroy.

Lover of all souls,

help us enter the New Year joyfully,  
willing to laugh and dance and dream,

remembering our many gifts with thanks  
and looking forward to blessings yet to come.

May we welcome your lavish love.

In this New Year, may the grace and peace of Christ  
bless us now and in the days ahead.

- *Source Unknown*



## Obedience

Listen ... put your phone away and listen

Take a photo if you must,

but then put it away and just listen ...

Listen to the gulls shrieking

no holds barred, wings flapping

necks outstretched, scrapping

over some tasty morsel, or scrap of litter

or just scrapping ... greedy,

gullible, guileful gulls

How like us ...

Now soaring, sublime,

wings outstretched, floating ...

feathers on the breath of God

Now earth-bound, almost

human in their strutting, self-righteous

stand-offs, their strident

self-importance ...

Listen, and watch, and know

that we are all, all of us,

yes, every one

made of stardust,

all holy, all blessed,

all home to the One who

gives us life and calls us Beloved.

– *Alison Kerr*

Once you have heard a child . . .

Once you have heard a child cry out to heaven for  
 help,  
 and go unanswered  
 nothing's ever the same again.  
 Nothing  
 Even God changes

But there is a healing hand at work  
 that cannot be deflected from its purpose  
 I just can't make sense of it, other than to cry.  
 Those tears are part of what it is to be a monk.  
 Out there, in the world, it can be very cold.  
 It seems to be about luck, good and bad,  
 and the distribution is absurd.

We have to be candles, burning between hope and  
 despair,  
 faith and doubt, life and death,  
 all the opposites.

- *William Broderick - The Sixth Lamentation*





## Our Guide

Becoming whole does not mean becoming “perfect”, when only good traits are present. It means accepting both all aspects both negative and positive of our being. It means accepting our impatience as well as our generosity.

This is why the journey of meditation is a transformative one. We are lead from brokenness to wholeness, to fullness of life. As John Main says in *The Moment of Christ*, “when we approach the centre of our being, as we enter our heart, we find that we are greeted by our guide, greeted by the one who has led us. We are welcomed by the person who calls each of us into personal fullness of being.” The glimpse of the truth that we are loved and accepted by the divine, as we are in all our brokenness, may be short, but once experienced it is never forgotten; it changes our whole life and allows us to respond to the ‘invitation, our destiny. . . to place our lives in complete harmony with this divine energy’. (*Way of Unknowing*). Then our way of being in the world is based on love and forgiveness and we no longer act out of our brokenness.

- *Kim Nataraja WCCM Weekly Teachings*

## Our True Selfhood

Meditation and the poverty of it is not self-rejection. We are not running away from ourselves; we do not hate ourselves. But to arrive at our true selfhood – and it is to that invitation we respond when we meditate – we must pass into the radical experience of personal poverty with an unflinching self-surrender.

- *John Main OSB*



## Passport into the Kingdom

There is no more crucial challenge than entering the experience of remaining other-centered. It is the ecstatic and continuous state of dispossession. We can glimpse it simply by calling to mind those moments or phases in life where we experienced the highest degree of peace, fulfillment and joy and recognize that those were times, not when we possessed anything, but when we lost ourselves in something or someone. The passport into the kingdom requires the stamp of poverty.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, 'The Selfless Self'*



## Peace

When we feel that we are included in the dance of being in which no one and no thing is wilfully excluded, we experience peace. Even in suffering and injustice, when nothing is excluded, peace can prevail. This is a peace beyond understanding, not as the world gives it.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB – Lenten Reflection*  
2022,



## Perfectionism

The demand for the perfect is the enemy of the possible good. Be peace and do justice, but let's not expect perfection in ourselves or the world. Perfectionism contributes to intolerance and judgmentalism and makes ordinary love largely impossible. Jesus was an absolute realist, patient with the ordinary, the broken, the weak, and those who failed. Following him is not a 'salvation scheme' or a means of creating some ideal social order as much as it is a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world, and to love the way that God loves – which we cannot do by ourselves.

- *Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflections*



## Pilgrimage

An ancient spiritual practice, pilgrimage invites seekers to travel away from home on journeys of intention in search of Sacred Encounter. It's not simply about traveling to a sacred site, however. Pilgrimage is an outer journey that contributes to an inner one. When we journey beyond our borders, exploring new cultures and landscapes, our entire lives can be transformed. . . . What makes your destination sacred is that you approach it with an attentive mind and an open heart. Once you've chosen the destination for your outer journey it's time to tend to your inner journey. Listen closely for the longings, questions, and desires stirring beneath the surface and pay attention to any invitations that rise. How will you keep vigil with these stirrings as you set out on your pilgrimage? How will you honor your longing as you seek insight from the Sacred Guide.

*- from asacredjourney.net*



## Poem

So let us pick up the stones over which we stumble,  
friends, and build altars.

Let us listen to the sound of breath in our bodies.

Let us listen to the sounds of our own voices, of our  
own names, of our own fears.

Let's claw ourselves out from the graves we've  
dug.

Let's lick the earth from our fingers.

Let us look up and out and around.

The world is big and wide and wild and wonderful  
and wicked,

and our lives are murky, magnificent, malleable, and  
full of meaning.

Oremus.

Let us pray.

- *Pádraig Ó Tuama*

## The Poverty of Christmas

There's really nothing necessarily pretty about the first Christmas. We have Joseph breaking the law, knowing what he should do with a seemingly "adulterous woman," but he doesn't divorce Mary as the Law clearly tells him to do, even though he has no direct way of knowing that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit [Matthew 1:18–24]. It can certainly lead us to wonder why so much of Christianity became so legalistic when we have at its very beginning a man who breaks the law to protect the dignity of the woman he loves. Then we clearly have a couple that is homeless and soon to be refugees or immigrants in their flight to Egypt shortly after Jesus' birth [Matthew 2:13–15].

So where is God revealing himself in this? Certainly not in the "safe" world, but at the edge, at the bottom, among those people and places where we don't want to find God, where we don't look for



God, where we don't expect God. The way we've shaped Christianity, one would think it was all about being nice and middle class and "normal" and under the law. In the Gospels, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are none of those things, so they might just be telling us we should be looking elsewhere for our status and dignity. Maybe the reason that our knowledge of God is so limited is because we've been looking for God in places we consider nice and pretty. Instead, God chooses the ordinary and messy.

- *Richard Rohr OFM*



## Questions begin to fade

‘I feel I’m maybe wasting my time, because every time I sit down to meditate my mind is full of thoughts and distractions and daydreaming the whole time.’ And then he said, ‘Is there any technique in addition to the mantra, any technique I could use to overcome this?’ It’s a very common experience, the feeling of discouragement. And that feeling of discouragement is often associated with the feeling, ‘what kind of experience should I be having?’ That’s also a question that many people have in the early stages of meditation. But I would say that we are all learning to meditate in the initial elementary stage until we make meditation a twice daily practice in our daily life. At that elementary stage we can still receive benefits, we can still enjoy the journey, but that’s the first phase, to get to the point where you can say ‘these two sessions of meditation every day are simply, naturally part of

my life'. After that first phase, after we've got into the discipline or the rhythm, those kinds of questions begin to fade naturally, automatically.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB Enlightenment*



## Radical Resilience

*[CAC theme for Daily Meditations for 2024]*

Contemplation helps us engage with a world on fire — without burning up or out.

We live in a world on fire. As the flames of unjust societies, humanitarian disasters, and ecological crises flicker around us, it is easy to feel helpless and overwhelmed. How can we respond to this destructive era with wisdom, love, and peace?

The path ahead will be challenging, but we will walk it together. That is why this year the Daily Meditations will explore contemplation as a way to build Radical Resilience — tending our inner flame so we can stand in solidarity with the world without burning up or out.

Radical Resilience is the ability to face hardship with greater love and deeper awareness. We believe that contemplation, the practice of being fully present, is one way to grow more resilient — teaching us how to sustain inner strength, purpose, and connectedness.

Contemplation shapes Radical Resilience as a way to choose love and peace over anger, denial, and despair. Imagining a better future begins by finding it within ourselves—only then can we help others tend to their own inner flame. Together we can live that better future out into the world.

- *Daily Reflections from the Centre for Action  
and Contemplation*



## Reconciliation

Of all the leaders of humanity Jesus is the strongest in delivering to his disciples the ministry of reconciliation. He sees peacemaking as one of the essentials of true happiness. Above all, he shows us that true peace is not a negative state – the mere absence of conflict – but an energy of wholeness and, like all forms of energy, it is transferable.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, WCCM Meditatio Newsletter, Sept. 2014*



## Recovering the Light

The contemplative has nothing to tell you except to reassure you and say that if you dare to penetrate your own silence and to advance without fear into the solitude of your own heart, and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through you and with you, then you will truly recover the light and the capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations because it is too close to be explained. It is the ultimate union, in the depths of your own heart, of God's spirit and your own secret inmost self, so that He and you are all in all one Truth and one Spirit.

- *Thomas Merton OCSO 'A Letter on the  
Contemplative Life'*



## Redemption

As Laurence Freeman puts it: ‘Redemption is knowing with our whole being who we are and where we have come from’. In the depth of our being we do remember who we truly are. As Jung reminds us in *Civilisation in Transition*: ‘To the constantly reiterated question “What can I do?” I know no other answer except ‘Become what you have always been . . . wholeness, which we always were without knowing it’. But all this is not easy, as we even read in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: ‘An Elder said “I have spent twenty years fighting to see all human beings as only one”’.

- *Kim Nataraja in WCCM Daily Teachings*





## Relearning how to see

In an online notebook written by Erik Varden, Catholic Bishop of Trondheim in Norway, he quotes Josef Pieper, a German philosopher who wrote in the 1950s:

‘Man’s ability to see is in decline . . . We do not mean here, of course, the physiological sensitivity of the human eye. We mean the spiritual capacity to perceive the visible reality as it truly is.’

Bishop Varden comments: To relearn to see, we must ‘recalibrate our senses to the wonders of the small’. Then great discoveries, perhaps even revelations, await us.

Varden’s episcopal motto is *coram fratribus intellexi* – ‘face to face with my brothers I have understood’. He believes that God’s living Word is addressed to us together, and that we need each other to receive it.

- *from: coramfratribus.com*



## Resurrection

What happens through the Resurrection story will not be confined to Jesus and his little dysfunctional community. It will spread everywhere like a forest fire starting with a match or a global virus with a single microbe. Wherever it goes it will shake the foundations of power and pride. It will bring the teaching and living spirit of Jesus to challenge and change our view of reality and our way of living.

In our divided and violent world, in Jerusalem, Kyiv and Moscow, it is our unfailing hope and our true peace.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB – reflection for  
Easter Day 2022*



## Seeking Truth

In contrast to the Hebrew tendency to view God as making revelations to them and to no-one else, he [St Justin Martyr] follows the parable of the Sower, and sees God as sowing the seed of wisdom throughout the world, to grow wherever the soil would receive it. When we dispute with people who disagree with us, we would do well to assume that they too are seeking wisdom and have truth of a kind.

– *Daily Reflection (on St Justin Martyr) Parish  
of St Gregory the Great, Cheltenham*



## Silence

Silence is a very perilous part of us. It tells us what we are obsessing about. Silence reminds us of what we have not resolved within ourselves. Silence shows to us the underside of ourselves from which there is no escape, which no amount of cosmetics can hide, what no amount of money or titles or power can possibly cure. Silence leaves us with only ourselves for company.

In the Civil War of the human soul which we wage daily, unless we are quiet and listen, we cannot know what is really going on, even in ourselves, especially in ourselves.

Silence frightens us because it brings us face-to-face with ourselves. We must go inside ourselves to wait for the God who is a whisper not a storm.

Silence is life's greatest teacher. It shows us what we have yet to become, and how much we still lack to become it. Silence, as the contemplative knows, is that place just before the voice of God.

It is the void in which God and I meet in the centre of my soul. It is the cave through which the soul must travel, clearing out the dissonances of life as we go, so that the God who is waiting there for us can fill us. Silence teaches our public self what to speak.

- *Joan Chittister OSB on YouTube*
- *'Seeking the interior life'*  
(*part 2 Silence*)



## Silence and our selfhood

Silence is necessary for our selfhood to emerge, for our own true self to emerge out of the chaos – out of the turbulence of feeling the history of pain, loss and fantasy, of memory, the whole chaos, the jungle of our mind. And the older we get, the more of the jungle there may be. Before we can even begin to appreciate what one's true self means, we have to enter into a deeper commitment to this work of silence, and then we begin to discover what silence does.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB*



## Silence and the Gift of Life

Silence is the state of being in which we respond to the gift of life. It is one of the creative paradoxes of the Spirit that only in this attentive listening, this silent openness, can we respond to the deepest mystery of our life appropriately.

- *John Main OSB, Monastery Without Walls*



## Silence is there within you

To learn to meditate, you have to learn to be silent, and not to be afraid of silence. . .

We don't have to create silence. The silence is there, within you. What we have to do is to enter into it, to become silent, to become the silence. The challenge of meditation is to allow ourselves to become silent enough to allow this interior silence to emerge. Silence is the language of the spirit. The language of the spirit is love. And the purpose of meditation is to be in the presence of love, the love that, as Jesus tells us, casts out all fear.

- *John Main OSB*





## Solidarity with Universal Suffering

If you allow reality to show itself to you in the daily news, in your own heart, you'll see that it almost always deserves sadness, disappointment, what the Bible calls lamentation, that things are not as they could be. Things are not as they should be. Now don't think of that in a sentimental way, but think of it as opposed to a judgmental way. It's bad. Get rid of it. No, it's a lesson and that leads you towards solidarity with the suffering of the world. Today many of us are joining that suffering through the lens of Ukraine or many of the drought-ridden countries of the world. We can't ignore that. We can't say this is not happening. But what it leads us to is not judgment or thinking we can eliminate it, not that we shouldn't do our bit to help, but we enter into solidarity with it. And that indicates the character of the life of prayer, a life of solidarity with universal suffering.

- *Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflection*

## Start Close In

Start close in

don't take the second step or third,  
start with the first thing close in  
the step you don't want to take.

Start with the ground you know  
the pale ground beneath your feet  
your own way to begin the conversation.

Start with your own question  
give up on other people's questions  
don't let them smother something simple.

To hear another's voice  
follow your own voice  
wait until that voice becomes  
a private ear that can really listen to another.

Start right now  
take a small step you can call your own  
don't follow someone else's heroics  
be humble and focused.

Start close in  
don't mistake that other for your own.

- *David Whyte*

## Starting Slowly

In spiritual things, as in every great undertaking, we must be patient and humble enough to start slowly. It is said that the professional mountain guides in Switzerland can always spot novice climbers. They start out too fast. The experienced mountaineer climbs very slowly, but avoids fatigue and eventually reaches the summit. In setting a rule of prayer, therefore, strive for a standard you are sure you can easily maintain. After adhering to a very modest goal faithfully for many months, you may consider raising it. Most likely you will find that what seemed easy in advance proves, over the long haul, to be difficult. Someone has said: a little thing is a little thing, but *faithfulness* in a little thing is a big thing’.

- *John Jay Hughes ‘Praying in Silence’*



## Stillness

On the spiritual journey it takes more energy to be still than to run. Most people spend so much of their waking hours rushing from one thing to another that they are afraid of stillness and of silence. A certain existential panic can overtake us when we first faced the stillness. But if we can find the courage to enter the silence, we find the peace that is beyond all understanding.

- *John Main OSB 'The Present Christ'*



## Struggles

There are forces that defeat us, perhaps must defeat us, so that we can somehow become persons. Could we think of the challenges as Angels that we must wrestle with until we gain a blessing from them, as Jacob did in the Old Testament? Not for a moment are we to skirt over the grit, sweat and pain of challenges, but we can see them as other than useless pain.

Deep friends can help each other here. With patience we lend our presence as our friend grapples. Tempted to intervene, we can remember that the struggle belongs to the friend and is not ours. If we try to fight someone else's battles we often rob them of their chance for resolution and dignity.

This is true in reverse. We must trust each other to be capable of wrestling with our Angels. To trust in this way is reverent. Misguided help can be worse

than no help. Let us be the help that supports both  
dignity and endurance.

- *Gunilla Norris 'Sheltered in the Heart. Spirituality  
in Deep Friendship'*



## The Absolute Love of God

If we are absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things, then we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love.

- *James Finley*



## The art of letting go

The practice of letting go of illusions and fantasies in order to commit to reality, to how it really is in this moment, is the practice of a lifetime. It is an ongoing process of letting go of role and status and the things we pride ourselves on. It is a practice of letting go of our need for things to stay the same; letting go of our need to avoid suffering.

We want to hold on because we want security. We want to know that this loved one, this home, this place will remain the same and be with us forever. The Buddha says, 'suffering is born out of desire'. Our desire for permanence breeds fear and so we hold on tight in an effort to still the inevitable tide of change. Our bodies age and our homes fall apart, or are no longer fit for purpose. Our children grow and leave home. Pandemics shut borders to globally dispersed families. Sickness, death, financial insecurity and life impact us. Nothing stays the same; nor should it. That way lies entropy. The energy that underlies life is made more and more unavailable by our desire to keep things the same. We become stuck, confined by our fear, whilst life goes forward without us.



As we practice this art of letting go, we learn to sit with how things are without seeking resolution or getting mired in the emotional pull of the past or the future.

- *Yvonne Smith, 'Meditations. Forty Days'*



## The Dance

What is serious to men is often very trivial in the sight of God. What in God might appear to us as "play" is perhaps what he Himself takes most seriously. At any rate, the Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden of His creation, and if we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance. We do not have to go very far to catch echoes of that game, and of that dancing. When we are alone on a starlit night; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Bashō we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash--at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the "newness," the emptiness and the purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a

glimpse of the cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things; or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not. Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.

— *Thomas Merton OCSO, New Seeds of Contemplation*



## The Fire of Love

Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

- *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ*



## The Guest House

*Translated by Coleman Barks*

This being human is a guest house.  
 Every morning a new arrival.  
 A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
 some momentary awareness comes  
 as an unexpected visitor.  
 Welcome and entertain them all!  
 Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
 who violently sweep your house  
 empty of its furniture,  
 still, treat each guest honorably.  
 He may be clearing you out  
 for some new delight.  
 The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
 meet them at the door laughing,  
 and invite them in.  
 Be grateful for whoever comes,  
 because each has been sent  
 as a guide from beyond.

- *Jalaluddin Rumi*



## The Manure Story

In Luke's gospel chapter 13 we have the story Jesus told of a man who owned a fig tree which wasn't bearing any figs. He told his gardener to chop it down, but the gardener said 'Give it another year. Let me give it some extra nourishment and maybe it will produce some figs.'

Eugene Peterson, in his book *Tell it Slant* calls this 'The Manure Story' and says that *we* are inclined to be like the fig tree owner. We see something that is wrong, whether in the world or in the church, and we fly into action, righting the wrong, confronting sin and wickedness, battling the enemy, and then we go out vigorously recruiting "Christian soldiers". We have just come across something that offends us, some person who is useless to us or the kingdom of God, "taking up the ground" and we lose patience and either physically or verbally get rid of him or her. "Chop him down! Chop her down! Chop it down". We solve kingdom problems by amputation.

Peterson sees quite clearly why we do this. Internationally and historically, killing is the predominant method of choice to make the world a better place. It is by far the easiest, quickest, and most efficient way to clear the ground for someone or something with more promise.

But The Manure Story interrupts our noisy, aggressive, problem-solving mission. Instead of goading us into action, it takes us out of the action. In a quiet voice the parable says: “Hold on, not so fast. Wait a minute. Give me some more time. Let me put some manure on this tree”. Peterson admits that manure is not a quick fix. It has no immediate results – it is going to take a long time to see if this makes any difference. But, he says, Jesus is best known for his fondness for the minute, the invisible, the quiet, the slow – yeast, salt, seeds, light. And manure.

- *From Eugene Peterson 'Tell it Slant'*



## The Power of Attention

In Fr John Main's 'Moment of Christ', in the second chapter, he is talking about how to deal with distractions. These are some of the points that he makes.

The first thing to do is to ignore the distraction, not to negotiate with it, or flirt with it but just drop it, ignore it. This then begins to develop an inner quality of stillness. So the distracted mind is constantly mobile, constantly restless and we feel this even physically, sometimes. You know, when you are churned up emotionally, it is difficult to sit still. You want to get up and do things. But as we ignore the distractions as they arise, we begin to develop this quality of hesychia, the word that means 'stillness' or 'silence'.

And then Fr John says, we're able to look into the depths. He uses this very widespread image in mystical literature, about water settling down and



becoming calm. And when it is calm you can see to the depths, you can see the bottom of it. Gregory of Nyssa, has a beautiful passage using that image. So when our minds are very turbulent, you can't see to that depth of your own being. You are just washed away by your mind, and the waves of thoughts. But as you ignore that, as the mantra leads you to a greater stillness, a greater clarity you can see into the depths of your own being. And that is the beginning of real self-knowledge, and with it comes real self-acceptance and therefore healing.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Meditatio Talk  
'Attention and Love'*



## The Prophetic Path

The prophet's path is about letting go of illusion and toppling false gods. Prophets are disrupters of the social consensus. They keep humanity free for God and God free for humanity

Our daily meditation theme this year is called The Prophetic Path. Most of us were trained to think of Christianity in general, not as a prophetic path, but as a contest, a contest which immediately frames reality in terms of win/lose, winners and losers. The Prophetic Path says there's a way of moving toward winning, that includes losing. Sin is part of the journey towards salvation. Once you hear this, I hope you can say, well of course, that's obvious. But most of us prefer the language of courtroom and judgment and contest where there are a few winners and lots of losers. This has not served history well.

And so The Prophetic Path talks about a journey of two steps forward, that necessarily includes one step

backwards. And that step backwards becomes the energy for the next two steps forward. This is wisdom literature as opposed to contest literature. . . The prophets were Jews but they also critiqued Judaism. You could say they took a step back. And each of us has to be able to critique our own group, our own self, our own teaching. And it's that counter-movement that becomes wisdom. There's point and there's counter-point, and we need both.

- *Richard Rohr OFM, Daily Reflections*



## The spiritual teacher

The essential work of the spiritual teacher is just this: not to tell us what to do but to help us see who we are. The self we come to know through grace is not a separate, isolated little ego-self clinging to its memories, desires, and fears. It is a field of consciousness similar to and indivisible from the consciousness that is the God of cosmic and biblical revelation alike: the one great I AM.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB*



## The Virtuous Life

The Greek word in Aristotle describing happiness is *eudaimonia*. It's not happiness in the ordinary sense, getting what I want. It describes a flourishing, a well-being. And it is achieved in the Greek mind by virtue. And virtue doesn't mean just doing good. Virtue is about doing everything we do in an excellent way. So you could be a virtuous carpenter, or a virtuous street cleaner, or a virtuous politician, or a virtuous mother, or a virtuous lawyer. If you do what you're doing, what is your duty to do, as excellently as you can, that is virtue. And it is, of course, the direct result of the attention we give to what we do, to our work in life, to our relationships, to our duty. If we give our full attention to it, and that means the attention that comes out of the true self, out of our spirit, from the heart, if we can put our mind, body, soul, strength into it, if we can do it with our whole heart, that means the work we do has virtue.

*The Brick Wall of the Ego 2 Laurence Freeman OSB*

## The Voice of Silence

If I choose to hide you away,  
it is for a reason.  
I have brought you to this place.  
Drink in the silence. Seek solitude.

(Listen to the silence)  
It will teach you  
It will build strength  
Let others share it with you  
It is little to be found elsewhere

Silence will speak more to you in a day  
than the world of voices can teach you  
in a lifetime  
Find silence. Find solitude  
- and having discovered her riches,  
bind her to your heart.

- *Francis J Roberts, Celtic Daily Prayer*



## The Way Forward

What is the 'new' trying to emerge in our life? . . .

What is the way forward for us? . . .

We must go now, you and I, where there is no path  
and leave a road.

- *Joan Chittister OSB, speaking to the Sisters  
of the Good Samaritan*



## The Whispering of God

There is hardly ever a complete silence in our soul. God is whispering to us almost incessantly. Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear these whisperings of God. He is always whispering to us, only we do not always hear, because of the noise, hurry, and distraction which life causes as it rushes on.

- *Frederick William Faber (1814-63)*

- *hymn writer and theologian*





## The Wisdom of the Body

. . . In the West, we rely predominately on “head” knowledge, but our hearts offer us plenty of information as well through powerful experience of awe and empathy, joy and heartbreak (even if we choose to dismiss it most of the time). But it seems to me that we have lost or ignored the wisdom of the body almost completely. I have often taught that if we are not transformed by our pain, we will almost certainly transmit it to those around us . . .

- *Richard Rohr OFM*



## This Fragile Planet

With our massive increase in technological power and economic growth, we have become exploiters. We have found ourselves disconnected from the power of beauty that is manifested throughout the cosmos and, with heart-breaking intensity, on this fragile planet.

But, because humanity has produced the problem, humanity can also solve it. We have the science and resources for a green revolution. But do we have the mind? Do we have the common purpose and sense of interdependence? Above all, do we have a capacity to see the sacred in our ecological relationships? Can we be ‘saved by beauty’?

[The contemplative] mind, taught by every wisdom tradition . . . sees through all ideas of separateness. Contemplative consciousness is integral to the saving of our planet. It nurtures in each one of us the capacity to see how economic and social justice, a

healthy lifestyle, self-control and the creative use of resources and technology are all inseparable.

Meditation does not solve every one of our problems but it does radically change the way we see them.

Most vitally, it opens the eye of the heart, so that we can shape our policies with wisdom, and ensure that compassion is never lost.

- *WCCM Outreach. Earth Crisis: Climate and Ecology*



## Time

Time is the problem solved by stillness. Anxieties of the future, the resurgences of the past that may flood our feelings, resolve over time and through deeper presence. No theology or neurology can explain the immense power of love set free by this deep stillness. Whatever else they may be as well in the world, the contemplative is a lover and an artist. Contemplation unleashes a flood of beauty and beauty shows us how the simplicity of the whole manifests in the present because it is present in each particle of every part.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Lenten  
Reflection, 2023*



## True wisdom

Wisdom isn't knowing more. It's knowing with more of you.

- *Cynthia Bourgeault in 'The Wisdom Jesus'*



## Two meditations a day

The advice coming from John Main for all of us out in the world is to meditate every day twice a day: “Probably the optimum times for meditating are the early morning and early evening. . . . If you can, choose the same time, and, if possible, the same place.” But John Main’s advice is always sensible, and he adds: “but all of us have to do the best we can in the circumstances of our life’. Many people who integrate this routine of the twice-daily meditation in their life find that they have more time and space in their day rather than less. There is a sense of order and completeness: ‘The morning time of meditation is to set the tone for your day, to set out onto your daily pilgrimage knowing who you are . . . and your evening meditation is to bring together all the various strands of the day’s activities, and unify them’.

- *Kim Nataraja WCCM Weekly Teachings*



## Un-formed, in-formed and trans-formed

Eckhart said the [spiritual] journey is about being ‘un-formed, in-formed and trans-formed’. John Main understood this as the absolute nature of meditation, while recognising it needed to be achieved by stages. What matters for him is actually starting the journey and ‘being on the way’, rather than thinking we should be doing better, and becoming too self-discouraged to start again. For him, the mantra combines these three stages of the journey in one: one simple act of pure, poor faith repeated and always leading us deeper.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, Lenten Reflection*  
2021



## Unlocking the shackles of limitation

One of the most difficult things for Westerners to understand is that meditation is not about trying to make anything happen.

But all of us are so tied into the mentality of techniques and production that we inevitably first think that we are trying to engineer an event, a happening. The first thing to understand, however, is that meditation has nothing to do with making anything happen. The basic aim of meditation is indeed quite the contrary: simply to learn to become aware of what is, to learn directly from the reality that sustains us. . . .

We so often live at such a small percentage of our full potential. If only we will turn from self to other, our expansion of spirit becomes boundless. It is all-turning; what the New Testament calls conversion.



We are invited to unlock the shackles of limitation, to be free from being prisoners within our self-limiting egos. Conversion is just this liberation and expansion arising when we turn from ourselves to the infinite God. It is learning to love God, just as in turning to God we learn to love one another. In loving we are enriched beyond measure. We learn to live out of the infinite riches of God.

- *John Main OSB*



## Vulnerability and love

Religious people easily neglect the obvious and this is the most obvious and the most necessary to remember: the unloving know nothing of God . . .

Because it is so demanding, it can almost seem that peace is more frightening than violence – the violence we do to ourselves or the violence done to others. Peace at depth turns our world upside down. We have to enter into a very fine balance of life, the fine frequency of the Spirit, to find the simplicity and subtlety to respond to Christ's dynamism. To enter into that depth, to open up to that depth means becoming vulnerable and remaining vulnerable, not only in prayer but in every part of life. Love creates vulnerability, the vulnerability of compassion or unconditional commitment. Maturely, we also have to learn to be resilient because being vulnerable will mean that we are wounded and we mustn't allow being wounded to close us up again.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB*



Where only love can go

Here alone with you, in the gathering darkness of  
this night,  
wrap my busy soul in silence.

Quiet the remains of the day and lay them to rest.

Erase my day's distractions, even my thoughts of  
you. Because they are not you, they are not enough.

There is a darkness deeper than this night where  
alone you can be found.

Take me then where only love can go.

- *Source Unknown*



## Wonder

When we feel wonder the ordinary is reborn. Lent is the celebration of the ordinary. All we have to do is return to the present. If we are sad it is a sign we are living in the past consumed with our thoughts and memories. If we feel anxious we are living in the future. But if we are at peace within ourselves and with others sadness and anxiety are overcome and we are in the present moment. We shouldn't look back at past experiences of peace trying to recapture them. Nor should we postpone now the work of returning to the present until we have solved our problems and secured ourselves against the worst. Whether we give something up and take on something extra, or not, we can do the most important thing of all that brings us to peace and benefits others: the practice of the presence of God.

- *Laurence Freeman OSB Reflection Ash*

*Wednesday 2023*

## Word

I, who live by words, am wordless when  
I try my words in prayer. All language turns  
To silence. Prayer will take my words and then  
Reveal their emptiness. The stilled voice learns  
To hold its peace, to listen with the heart  
To silence that is joy, is adoration.  
The self is shattered, all words torn apart  
In this strange patterned time of contemplation  
That, in time, breaks time, breaks words, breaks me,  
And then, in silence, leaves me healed and mended.  
I leave, returned to language, for I see  
Through words, even when all words are ended.  
I, who live by words, am wordless when  
I turn me to the Word to pray. Amen.

- *Madeleine L'Engle*



## You can do it

So you say your mantra with care and attention. You lay aside any other problem, thought or distraction that comes into your mind. Just as when you are working and you have got a difficult problem to solve or you have a deadline to meet you say, ‘I can’t deal with those other issues at the moment; I have to get this thing done.’ Well, bring that quality of determination and focus, to your meditation. That’s all you have to do. You can do it. You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t able to do your job. Or you wouldn’t be in the job for very long if you weren’t able to do it. You can do it. You have just got to apply that skill and that quality to your meditation time

- *Laurence Freeman OSB, The Work of Selfless  
Attention*

