

SPIRITUALITY OF THE DESERT

DESERT WISDOM

Hearing that a brother was to be brought before the council, he came also, carrying a leaking basket of sand. He said, "How should I judge my brother when my sins run out behind me like the sand in this basket?"

Abba Moses

Nothing can overcome us, but only humility.

Amma Theodora

We need to be emptied, otherwise prayer is only a game....
the simplest and most effective way to sanctity
is to disappear into the background of ordinary everyday routine

Thomas Merton

***Blessed are the poor in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

Matthew 5:3

(A good translation of this Beatitude comes from Charles Elliott: "You are in the right place when you are poor in spirit")

Michael Leunig says there are only “two feelings, two languages, two motives: love and fear.”

Rowan Williams says we have to reckon with two realities: “unreconciled pain and unexhausted compassion.”

And the American poet Adrienne Rich says: there are only two realities: “dread and the surviving sense of a possible happiness.”

Julian of Norwich says: Peace and love are always in us, living and working, but we are not always in peace and love.

Each is saying in their own way how it is for us.

The desert is the place where we experience fear – unreconciled pain – not being in peace and love.

This is the poverty of not knowing, of not having any answers.

Can you feel the cost of being accurate about how it is for you?

Can you stay with this poverty, this not knowing, this terrible silence of God?

Can you begin to experience the life and freedom that comes from this poor place,

which turns out to be for you, the right place?

It is when from the innermost depths of our being we need a sound that means something – when we cry out for an answer and it is not granted to us – it is then we touch the silence of God.

Simone Weil

Touching the silence of God is never easy. Our temptation is to betray the silence with shallow words, with a false peace when there is no peace. Jesus invites us to see that such silence can be a rich and privileged place of encounter. The “sacrament” of the desert leads us through silence and simplicity to purification and love.