

Homily – 2nd Sunday of Advent - 5th December 2021

How am I being tested by life?

Hermits have something to teach us!

There is a wholeness to creation beyond dominion and empires. God speaks to us from the wilderness.

George Orwell's prophetic book 1984, published, I think in the 1950's was a radical 'blueprint' of times to come. The ensuing Monitoring and control of humanity by earthly powers.

Orwell was in effect a hermit, secluded on a Hebridean Island he formulated his predictions of how life will be in the future, emotionally scarred by his involvement in the Spanish Civil War of 1936 and the rise of Communism in 1945 and the defeat of Naziism.

The effect of withdrawing for sometime from the rat race of the world, perhaps helps us to take a more objective view of reality. To see the bigger picture. Many of the great saints have done this, like Charles Borromeo, St Benedict and St Catherine of Siena, St Theresa of Avila & Padre Pio.

Thomas Merton, once a playboy of 1940's America, became a Cistercian Monk, a hermit and one of the great Christian mystics in the 20th Century – writing 'The 7 Storey Mountain + 'Elected Silence'.

He wrote of Christian solitude, and the very nature of contemplation, which is to renounce oneself of selfish use of and joining a selfish world. The kernel of it is not found in abandonment of this wretched society but by a renunciation of self-love and a recovery of the love of God and his love and compassion for the human race; his essential concern is for humanity and for the planet we created; which is similar to the psyche of St John the Baptist in the Gospel.

As Thomas Merton, wrote of Christian solitude, "Without faith, such a life could not possibly make real sense and this witness is at the same time the purest act of love for other people, my gift (as a hermit) to them, my contribution to their joy in the good news of Jesus Christ, and to their awareness that the Kingdom of Christ is in the midst of us" – it implies a certain freedom from institutional structures. A bit like St John the Baptist.

Unfortunately, many of us find it hard to reap the benefit of being immersed in the life of Spiritual Solitude, - of stepping off the frantic 'Merry go Round' of life. We are often too caught up in compromising our Christian ideals by political culture, family life, the pressure to work, career ambition, materialism and the external image of appearing beautiful, successful and happy. If we all became hermits the world's economy would grind to a halt, B&M, Poundland and Home Bargains and Lidl, would go bust.

But what we can do in Advent, as in other times in our lives, is be inspired by the mystics, hermits and contemplatives of our world to become a more spiritual person. To have real faith in God, to trust more, to be less materialistic. To pray in solitude with nature, to become more spiritual, - thereby less self-centred and see the bigger picture of life in all its beauty, that transcends all the nonsense, the half-truths, and the propaganda of life. It is by contemplative prayer that we admit what a fool or idiot I have been in my past life, and how God is calling me to make a fresh start, by a loving contrite spirit.

Remember always to relish and rejoice in the simple pleasures and beauty of life – in nature. As Merton writes, don't get too obsessed about contemplation but rather rejoice at smelling a flower in

the garden. Better to enjoy the sunshine or some light reading than to claim to be in contact with something that one is not in contact with at all.

How can we relish the higher things of God if we cannot enjoy some simple little things that comes along as a gift from God... like a ladybird climbing up my finger?

One of the beautiful experiences of life this past week was popping into all the shops on the Broxburn High Street, and meeting the people that worked in them, lots of nice folk. I could have had a complete body rebuild on Broxburn High Street, teeth whitening, haircut, new spectacles, nail job, foot massage, a pint of Guinness, a curry, therapy, a pizza and a Romanian to paint my walls. There's a lot going on. God help me to take time to marvel at the beauty of the simple things of life.

AMEN

Fr Jeremy Bath