

Chaplaincy Retreat at Alton Castle

Thoughts for a quiet period On Saturday morning

Realism about myself - integrity

Integrity is having my whole self together and alive, so that when I take a decision or commit myself, it is something that engages my whole personality, all its forces. There are in most of us *disintegrating* qualities, often parts of our personality that are not harmonized, maybe not accepted or welcomed, and which damage our capacity to give, to belong to others, or to another, or to God. We cannot give ourselves totally until we accept, possess ourselves totally.

Prayer is a time when I can return to God, who chose me and called me into being in preference to all possible others. Whatever my feelings, *I am precious in his sight*. The realization slowly dawns on me, that *I can meet God in the depths of my own heart*. That this is in fact the only way to understand my whole self, and accept all that is in me. It is making contact with the will of the one who made me.

Why did you make me?

Once I have entered courageously into the depths of my own being, and encountered the God who is waiting there for me, I have a foothold in the eternal. The task now is, in the words of the Eastern church, *to bring the mind into the heart*. "Once I am firmly fixed on that axis, I can bring all the worlds that I experience, both visible and invisible, into harmony and relationship with it. This is the highest activity that human beings are capable of: it is the purpose for which they were created." (Cyprian Smith, OSB, *The Path of Life*)

A few questions for consideration:

- 1 Can I understand my prayer as the great work of my life, opening up and embracing all other tasks and powers?
- 2 Can I believe in a world of *spiritual* realities becoming the great uniting factor of my life – realer than the physical facts?
- 3 Can I bear to *surrender* my urge to be in control, to be in charge of my life, knowing that no-one can control God?
- 4 Do I know that prayer is *letting God take me* rather than something active that I do? What if God seems to do little or nothing in the time I give him?
- 5 Do I believe that prayer is always answered – even if the experience seems like "talking into an airing cupboard"? Do I measure my prayer by the *emotional* register, in which case is it really a self-centred exercise on its own terms?
- 6 Does it seem credible that removing obstacles to prayer is removing obstacles to life – that we pray more easily when our lives are less greedy, less selfish, less possessive or jealous, more ordered to holiness?
- 7 Has your prayer ever unearthed something in yourself that you did not like (as if you had turned over a boulder, exposing slugs)? If so, were you glad?
- 8 Don't get side-tracked by much talk of techniques of prayer. They can be hidden ways of being self-centred rather than open to God.