

Repentance

Some thoughts and points for prayer

Set aside that notion of “repentance” which means “regret for the past”. We aren’t here to make revulsion or self-hatred into a way of life, and the contemplation of evil in ourselves is only a moment of grace when God enters the picture.

Think about the prophetic idea of repentance:

- The perception that we’ve been turning our back on God, pretending he isn’t there, isn’t with us, doesn’t see or care where we are or what we do or what’s done to us. That’s a dead god.
Result: poverty, a life lived like an orphan, ultimate loneliness.
- “Repentance” means swivelling on a sixpence, and finding ourselves face to face with a God who’s been with us all the time.

Think about idols and idolatry

Easy to say *Idols don’t exist*. But false gods *DO* exist - and sit in the way that leads to the real God. Here are a few:

- The god that doesn’t exist.
- The god I can’t believe in.
- The god who can wait till later.
- The god who is too far away for me to seek him.

“There isn’t an encounter with God that isn’t transforming in its effects.”

- What does this say about our experiences of God in the past,
- or our attitude to encounters with God now? Do we expect transformation or even want it? Would we have room for it in our busy schedule?

“Love, once glimpsed, relativises everything else.”

We can talk glibly about loving God, hardly noticing the double-standard use of the word “love”. So “God loved us first” is the source of love; in our making and in our redeeming, his love is the constant factor. God’s love is of a different order from ours, unreachable, undeservable, inexhaustible.

- We don’t have to deserve it; it is already there.
- We can’t stop it: even if we’re indifferent, God loves us infinitely.
- The greatest saint has hardly scratched the surface of understanding it.
- Encountering divine love – realising the ultimate truth - becomes the source of meaning for the rest of our decisions and deeds.

Repentance as recrimination or regret, accompanied by self-punishment: the urge to make ourselves “clean” enough to impress God: beating ourselves up with harsh penance in order to dominate our life: all these things demand the *absence* of God. Christian repentance, by contrast, happens because God is present, real, encountered, and everlastingly loving.