



QUIET DAY: REFLECTION BY BRIAN

It is the practice of most Benedictine communities to read a section of the Rule of St Benedict each day. On 3 April the section to be read at Mucknell is Chapter 52 'The Oratory of the Monastery', and what follows is a brief reflection on part of that chapter.

'..anyone who, at other times, wishes to pray privately may simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and heart-felt devotion.'

Benedict speaks very little about personal prayer and when he does it is perhaps different to what we might expect. A classic image of prayer is of silence and stillness in a manner of reverence and calm, and yet here Benedict is clear that he finds it quite natural that his monks would approach God with tears in their eyes.

The tears and devotion of the person at prayer is a powerful image and one which reminds us that prayer is that most intimate of acts. Yes, there are times when prayer is formal and structured, but if prayer is to be true it will emerge from the joys and pains of the depths of who we really are. There is no sophisticated process to learn or special techniques to adopt, rather we are invited to have the courage and honesty to come to God with the treasures of our heart. It is deceptively simple and perhaps we quickly realise that with God, as well as with our neighbour, we try and dress up our communications with all sorts of fantasy and avoidance and pretence. We believe, perhaps because we were told, that prayer must only contain the 'proper' words and expression of someone who is devout and so a certain distance or barrier is constructed for the purposes of good order and security. Why can't we let God in? Are we afraid of what we and God may discover?

As we continue our Lenten journey towards Easter we will no doubt hear the passage about Christ in the garden, where with tears and sighs he prays to God that the cup may pass from him. The tears of hurt, anger, love, and fear fall from Christ's face in surely one of the most intimate of scenes in the gospels. As the tears fall the reality of prayer, faith, and devotion are expressed in a way that words alone might fail to achieve. Here is Christ facing the culmination of his ministry and witness and he weeps with the truth of what is to come.

Christ's tears may be seen as a model of prayer. This is not to say that we must force tears to come or that without tears prayer is in some ways defective, but we can all recognise that tears signify what is most precious in our lives. We cry with the pain of loss or fear, or we may cry with tears of delight and joy and love, and whether we are someone who cries easily or not, we realise that what we reveal in those moments is what is true, even if it is buried under layers and accretions of self-protection; doctrines of forgiveness and grace find life and reality in the tears of prayer.

In these days when all over the world what is normal has often been stripped away we are left with many questions, worries, and hopes. We are experiencing perhaps a longing for the usual routines and certainties, and yet at the same time a delight in experiencing or reading about acts of courage and love. Benedict, I think, would remind us that in our prayers we bring all that before God. In these

days we do not have the luxury of taking for granted the regular routines or even relationships, and so we approach God with the devotions of our heart revealing to him the anxiety, the anger, the joy and the thankfulness of our lives, and as we do that we can be confident that God will meet us in that place.