

St Luke's in the City

Celebrating at the Crossroads 1st Sunday in Lent 2008

Dear Friends,

"Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matthew's word literally means 'to hide'. God remains for humans hidden, in the sense that complete and absolute knowledge of God is not humanly possible. Nevertheless, we humans are made to search for God, as Saint Augustine famously observed: "You have made our hearts restless, until they find their rest in you." This search for God, which is our search for meaning and purpose and ultimate truth, requires a life-long process of evolution of consciousness, a heroic and arduous journey from infantile and tribal ways into truly adult ways.

Jesus knew that times of suffering and crisis are inevitable in human evolution, that those who undergo times of crisis must not be anaesthetised against the suffering, and in order to endure the suffering creatively we must fast. Though tribal religion thinks only of fasting as exclusively to do with food, this is in fact a reductive cop-out. Talk, reading, excessive activity, entertainment, addictions of many kinds, including the addictions to work, excitement, property, security and productivity are all potential means by which we attempt to avoid the inner crisis of the soul. The greater the urge to talk more, to be entertained more, to read more, to have more, to be more productive, to be more secure, and so on, and so on, the more pressing is our need of fasting, of being empty from the external point of view. For if we do not fast when it is needed by our soul our inner contents leak out.

But when we pray to God who is in the hidden place in our souls, the One who resides in the hidden place rewards us. The reward is this: our inner forces are confined, the pressure builds, the creative, evolutionary development will be undertaken. All of us must face, sooner or later, '40 days' of the kind of crisis and suffering we would never choose for ourselves. Desert. Hospital. Prison. Homelessness. Bankruptcy. Unemployment. Accident. Illness. Isolation. There are as many ways of being propelled into the hidden place in the soul as there are uniquely different humans.

In the creative fasting that contains the inner forces of the soul, in hiddenness, we come to discover that the true temple is inside ourselves. We can enter the 'holy of holies' which is our own soul - but not as a spectacle for others. We cannot make contact with Eternity, with the God whom our hearts seek, unless we contain and confine the vast creative energies within the hiddenness of our own soul. Lent is the church's symbol for this necessary withdrawal to the hidden room.

With my love,
David