



Catholic Women's League Hong Kong Newsletter

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In this Issue

Page 2: Meditating the Christian way

Page 3: Way of the Cross up the Trappist Hill

Page 4: Acceptance, the secret of real freedom
Pope Francis moved by Iraqi Christian's witness

Dates to Remember

March 18: Day retreat at Our Lady of Lourdes Chapel, Lamma Island

June 3: Annual Raffle Draw

Zoom Mass

Zoom mass for CWL members every **Thursday** at **10:30 am** followed by **Holy hour**.

The **Mothers' Evening Prayer group** meets every Tuesday at 9 pm on zoom.

From Fr Russell's Desk...

A Lenten Message

Ash Wednesday was on 17 February this year, the day on which ashes (obtained by burning the palms left over from last year's Palm Sunday) are placed on our foreheads with the accompanying words: *Remember you are dust and into dust you will return*, to remind us of our mortality. In scripture sack-cloth and ashes symbolized a penitent's sorrow for sin and were a plea for the prayerful sympathy of fellow-believers.

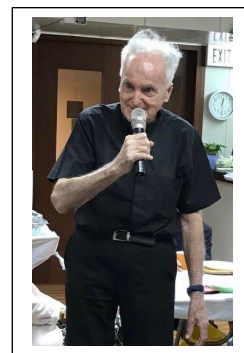
We receive the ashes as a declaration of our serious intent to enter the spirit of Lent as we join the Church's 40-day community retreat of renewal, and we prepare to celebrate the great mystery of our redemption, the death and resurrection of our Saviour. We should not look on Lent in a gloomy, negative way. After all the word derives from an Old English word *lengtentide*, meaning *springtime*, when the daylight hours lengthen, when nature comes alive again, a time for sowing, filling us with hope for the future.

We all want to come alive, to grow strong in the spirit and to love God and neighbour. And most of the time we don't do too badly. But we want to be comfortable as well, and we tend to love ourselves more than we do our neighbour. With the result that we don't always have our hearts sufficiently set on the good we would like to be and do. We need the annual discipline of Lent.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are traditional practices of all religions. They have been found to be effective means of bringing the believer closer to God and neighbour. They are still relevant. Supposing you resolve to pray a little more: commending to God each day your family and friends, individually by name; or often repeating a phrase from scripture: *my Lord and my God* or *Lord, just say the word and my soul shall be healed* or *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*.

Ours is a snacking generation. We eat too much at meals and take too many snacks in between. How about cutting down on these in solidarity with the millions of our brothers and sisters worldwide who have not enough to eat? A prayerful Lent will enable us to celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the foundational feast of our religion, the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

(Fr Russell has been spiritual director of the Catholic Women's League since 1991.)

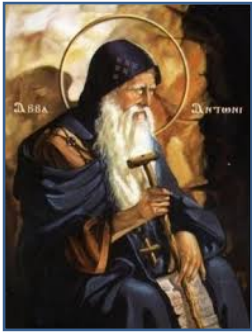


Meditating the Christian way

The aim of meditation and all Christian prayer is to deepen our relationship with God.

About 15 CWL members attended a talk and interactive session with Father Tommy Murphy on January 28, to explore the tradition of Christian meditation and learn more about it as a form of prayer.

Our true self is much deeper than our mind. The core of any meditation is to go deeper into our true spirit, where God dwells, Fr Tommy said. It helps us break through that block.



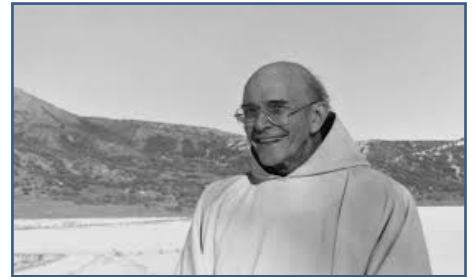
St Antony of Egypt

The concept of Christian Meditation traces its roots back at least to the Desert Fathers. They were early Christian hermits whose practice of asceticism in the Egyptian desert, beginning in the 3rd century, formed the basis of Christian monasticism. These early monks followed the example of Jesus's life of poverty, service and self-denial and devoted themselves to vows of austerity, prayer and work. St Anthony of Egypt is considered one of the greatest exponents of early desert monasticism.

At the turn of the fourth century, a young monk John Cassian, and his companion Germanus travelled far to sit at the feet of the Desert Fathers in the hope of learning how to pray through ascetic practices. Cassian discovered what is today called the “mantra” and his work had a big influence on the development of western monasticism.

A “mantra” is a single word or short phrase that the person repeats throughout the meditation period. The word “mantra” is Sanskrit, and means “that which clears the mind.” The mind thus casts out and renounces the rich and ample matter of all thoughts and restricts itself to the poverty of a single verse.

Thomas Keating, an American Catholic monk and priest of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (also known as Trappists) was one of the principal developers of the practise of Centering Prayer, a contemporary method of contemplative prayer. Here you choose a word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.



Thomas Keating

The WCCM is a global spiritual community united in the practice of meditation in the Christian tradition founded by the Benedictine monk, John Main. It shares the fruits of this practice widely and inclusively, serving the unity of all and building understanding between faiths and culture.

There are two kinds of Meditation -- Discursive and Silent.

Discursive Meditation can be a mental or an imaginative process. It uses the brain, judgements or intuition. It can be a mental process like reading the scripture or a psalm and then concentrating on the words or a phrase that catches your attention. It is primarily a mental or rational process of meditation that may lead to quiet contemplation.

The imaginative form of meditation was developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. His Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers and contemplative practices to help people deepen their relationship with God.

In Silent Meditation we do not use the mind actively. The mind is very quiet. For many of us it is our mind that kills us. It could be feelings of vengeance, revenge, fears, anxieties, thoughts of the past. The practise of meditation helps us tell the mind- “I’m not going to worry”. We focus on our breath or on a word or phrase. For example, “Jesus” or “Jesu” or “Jesus I love you”, or the mantra “Maranatha”.

Here are a few steps that will help you to meditate.

1. Take a comfortable position.
2. Relax your hands.
3. Close your eyes lightly.
4. Let go of your worries and plans.
5. Slowly repeat your mantra.

Do not think or imagine anything — spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation; so keep returning to simply saying the mantra. Meditate each morning and evening for about 20 or 30 minutes.

While Christian meditation may help you to have better health, lose weight, become calmer, reduce stress and have peace of mind, its primary purpose is to help you deepen your relationship with God who dwells within you. **By Nirmala Thomas**

Way of the Cross up the Trappist Hill



Our Lenten Activity

25 February 2021 was a cloudy morning with a few unexpected showers. But the unfavourable weather was not a portent of the day ahead. Neither did it dampen the spirit of 23 ladies from CWL and St Joseph's Ladies Guild, who gathered at the ferry pier to make their way to Peng Chau and thereon to the Trappist Hill to pray the Way of the Cross.

It is not often that one gets to do the Stations of the Cross in such an idyllic setting. And we were very fortunate to be led by Father Tommy Murphy. As we made our way up the hill, the skies cleared up, and the day brightened.

The monks at the Trappist Monastery opened their doors for us to celebrate a face-to-face mass, an absolute privilege in times of restrictions. This was followed by a short hike over to Discovery Bay where we ended the day with a delectable Chinese lunch at a local club.

We are grateful to Fr Tommy and all the lovely ladies who helped make it such a memorable day.



Acceptance: the secret of real freedom

Being in prison is very difficult. Deprived of your freedom and isolated from your family and friends is a frightening experience. But this is the lot of thousands of prisoners here in Hong Kong. Being a prison chaplain allows me the privilege to meet many prisoners who are anxious to talk about their situation.

Visits from family and close friends are a treasured moment when for a short time the prisoner can see and talk with those they can trust. But for international prisoners who are incarcerated in Hong Kong prisons, their homes and families are often several thousands of miles away. Not being able to speak Cantonese, further isolates them from supportive friendships and leaves them prone to despair and depression.

For many prisoners, both local and foreign, it is the first time they have encountered the legal system with its complicated slow-moving bureaucracy. But somehow they survive and find ways to keep their spirits up. From visiting them in their day rooms and in the exercise yard, it seems to me that they are able to focus on one day at a time and on what needs to be done next.

A surprising number of them ask for a crucifix or a copy of the Bible and many tell me that they pray each day. Some have recovered their faith as they use their time in prison to reflect on their lives and on what is really important. Others want to pray with me and some look forward to getting together in small standing groups to make some prayers of petition before I finish the visit.

As they await a court appearance they try to keep some contact with their legal representatives and they hope for a lenient judge when their case comes to trial. They know more or less the length of the sentence they will receive for the particular charge they are facing.

I am impressed by those prisoners who have acknowledged their crimes and are able to accept their situation. They know they did wrong and are now ready to accept their sentence. In some way, precisely because they have acknowledged their wrong doing and are ready to accept the consequences, these people are quite free in themselves. I think that as a result of having acknowledged their actions and accepted who they are, they have become quite free interiorly. Maybe we who live on the outside can learn something from them about the secret of real freedom. **By Fr Tommy Murphy**

Pope Francis moved by Iraqi Christian's witness

Aboard the papal plane: Pope Francis said on Monday that the sight of the destroyed churches and ruins in Mosul and the Nineveh plains in northern Iraq left him speechless. "When I stopped in front of the destroyed church, I had no words... beyond belief," Francis said on March 8.

The Pope's March 5-8 trip to Iraq brought him from Baghdad to the birthplace of Abraham and finally to the rubble-strewn city of Mosul, where the Islamic State declared its caliphate in 2014.

"But then what touched me most was the testimony of a mother in Qaraqosh," Pope Francis said on his flight back to Rome. "She is a woman who lost her son in the first Islamic State bombings, and she said a word: 'forgiveness.' I was moved."

Pope Francis met Doha Sabah Abdallah, the mother who lost her son, in the Syriac Catholic Immaculate Conception Church in Bakhdida, also known as Qaraqosh. The town, 20 miles southeast of Mosul, was occupied by ISIS from 2014 to 2016.

Abdallah shared the story with the pope and those gathered in the church of the bombing of the town in August 2014 that killed her son, his cousin, and a young neighbour.

"Our strength undoubtedly comes from our faith in the Resurrection, a source of hope. My faith tells me that my children are in the arms of Jesus Christ our Lord. And we, the survivors, try to forgive the aggressor, because our Master Jesus has forgiven his executioners. By imitating him in our sufferings, we testify that love is stronger than everything," the Iraqi woman said.

Reflecting on this moment during the in-flight press conference, Pope Francis said: "I forgive. This is a word we have lost. We know how to insult big time. We know how to condemn in a big way ... But to forgive, to forgive one's enemies. This is the pure Gospel. This hit me in Qaraqosh." (*From the Catholic news Agency*)