

Lent IV, March 26th, 2017
Meditation offered by Kieva Diamond

On Friday evening I went to the Dal Killam library to work on this meditation while Eli took the boys to his mother's house for dinner. It was a rare moment for me, amid the usual kerfuffle of my life, to spend time contemplating in quiet, away from my children—who so very dear as they are to me, do not allow for prolonged, or concentrated thought for many minutes in a row. It was strange to be in that library where I had spent so many late nights as a student years before trying to stay focused on my task of finishing assignments. And there I was again, at such a different stage of my life—still trying to stay focused and finish an assignment—and worrying whether I had not, from lack of practice, lost the ability to sustain prolonged meditation and thought on a single theme for many minutes together. Perhaps I had, through necessity, exchanged that capacity, for the capacity to juggle multiple simultaneous demands and to leap quickly from contemplation to action (diving into the middle of fraternal disputes, wrestling would-be weapons from the hands of my youngest etc.) As I opened my notepad to start writing, I realized that there was not a single page that had not been drawn or scribbled all over in the whole book. Also, I noticed that in my haste to hustle out the door with the kids to meet Eli at the library I had forgotten to bring anything to write with, and had to make do with a pencil I found on the ground. Grateful though I was to find it, I could only write as long as the lead held out, but I was able to write for a good few pages, over and around my children's art, which was long enough for me to remember that even in the midst of my student days, I had always had a regrettably wandering habit of mind.

I begin with this personal account, (and demonstration of that wandering habit) partly so that you can maybe appreciate what a feat it was for me to get anything down on paper at all, and also because of the beginning Father Crouse makes of this fourth chapter on pilgrimage:

One may see [he says] the whole of Christian history as an exegesis, in thought and action, of the word of God. Or, perhaps, we might even better call it an eisegesis - a 'reading in' of ourselves into the word and will of God; a reading of ourselves into the paradise of God, where, in a fundamental and altogether crucial sense, we already are.

What a wonderful thought! A reading *in* of our very selves, of our individual and particular pilgrimage into the paradise of God! These seemingly petty struggles of everyday life, the minutiae, that seem so often to get the better of me, are all part of the pilgrimage, not back to paradise, but forward, on to something better. *In melius renovabimur*^[11], says St. Augustine, "we shall be changed into something better".

This is, says Crouse, the watchword of a new view. A view which would define Western Christian spirituality through the Middle Ages, the Reformation and down to our

own time. This new view is defined in contrast to the paradisaical image as expressed by early Christian thinkers such as Origen, who says that, "the end is always like the beginning"; God "will restore that state which rational nature possessed when there was no need of eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil". And as remarked by St. Gregory of Nyssa who said that, "It is indeed possible for us to return to the original beatitude, if we will now run backward on the same road which we had followed when we were ejected from Paradise together with our forefather [Adam]".^[6]

Augustine, though not the inventor of this new view, was, says Crouse, the great architect of the transformation. Augustine's mentor, Ambrose of Milan makes this stunning exclamation:

O truly necessary sin of Adam, which by the death of Christ is done away! O happy fault, which merited such and so great a Redeemer!^[12]

The journey of the prodigal son, who goes out from his father's presence, is not just a falling away from grace. His misuse of that divine gift of rational will—when he fixes upon finite goods as though they were the absolute and perfect good - leads him to his lowest point of destitution amongst the swine. But it is only from this point that he sees and learns to long for that absolute good. The father sees him returning from afar and runs to meet him and the rejoicing at the prodigal's return is greater than for the brother who never strayed. His pilgrimage brought him not full circle to where he had started but on, through grace to something better.

"Where sin abounded," says St. Paul, "grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

The contemplation of childhood, which I find ample time for (after a fashion), is the most illuminating meditation on the nature of God and our relation to God as children. That he has called us to be his children, and that we may call him Father, is the most unbelievably hopeful and comforting assurance we could possibly be given. We have the gift of that human imitation of divine parenthood so that we may know the love of God. For "the invisible things of him from creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." (Rom. 1:20).

The innocence of the newborn represents for us the innocence of the paradisaical garden. As parents, we cherish that innocence and try to protect and shield it. But of course every child, like Adam and Eve, is given that gift of will—the gift to love freely and so of course to love that which is less, above the best and truest—if we so choose. And of course we do choose.

How soon a baby learns to take issue with all the careful arrangements made for his own good. There is nothing like the pure rage of a six-month old at not being allowed to

handle the sharp knives that have taken his fancy. There is no purer expression of outraged indignation. It seems that the moment we discover that we have a will, it becomes our chief motivating force to exert that will, whatever the cost. And of course all kinds of wrong actions become possible and actual.

As a parent, it is easy to become dismayed at the direction our child chooses—surely with the right training methods, attentiveness and positive reinforcement at just the right moment, our children will move from childhood to adulthood along a smooth course of reasonable and right action. It seems we would if we could deny them their God-given gift, the gift of rational will, which for each of us plays out in all the particular struggles, both great and small, as our pilgrimage through the wilderness and onward to the salvation freely given where we are “changed into something better.”

The New Adam is not just original integrity reconstituted, says Crouse, but something new and infinitely more... .. maturity in Christ is something more than the innocence of Adam.

It is only in that wilderness that we learn, through the disappointments brought on by our own wayward loves—to long for that highest and best good. And in that need and longing, it is by... (to finish with Crouse’s words):

[t]urning inward, the soul discovers the presence of eternal Truth, transcending and illuminating, as the necessary pre-condition of its understanding. To see directly that eternal Truth, the ground of the being and intelligibility of all created things, and to know and love all things in that one Truth, and only there, is the final goal of the soul’s ascent.