

We are easily deceived – that could of course go in many ways. Some might accuse us of being deceived in our pursuit of a monastic life and they'd be right if the fruits of monastic living were not there for them to see also: that zeal that monks should practise with the most burning love so as 'To be the first in showing honour to each other' [Rom 12] that bearing of one another's weaknesses whether of body or character, with the most tolerant patience, that vying with one another in showing mutual obedience and mutual love and so on. It's all there in the very last chapter in the Rule of St Benedict, encapsulating the purpose of the many works and regulations contained in the rest of the Rule: a Rule written for beginners in the art of love. If the love and it's works are not apparent then something has gone badly wrong, something is missing, for the love of neighbour and the love of God are one and indeed Teresa of Avila will stress the priority of the former because, like the incarnation, it is already evidence of God at work

'The more advanced you see you are in love for your neighbour the more advanced you will be in the love of God'. Quoted in Peter Tyler

Her remedy for 'melancholia' indeed is action – not thinking about oneself or even God, but service.

'The soul is not thought therefore the soul's profit consists not in thinking much but in loving much.' ibid

Now what has that got to do with living in apocalyptic times, indeed in times when wars and plagues and famines really do seem to signal an end time. Well the same question applies to us in our own lives when we face the inevitability of death as the years slip by and I think of Sr. Magdalen insisting on drying up the knives and forks in her last years, and of Mother Lucia still wielding a hoe in the Easter Garden with great frailty but much determination and Br. Herbert still writing letters and still painting at 101, the equivalent perhaps of planting a tree despite knowing that the world will end tomorrow. These are not just symbolic gestures which may carry the weight of denial even, but the very gestures that make us who we are, that form us in love, that incarnate God in our lives. They tell us not only that this world matters to us but also to God, and it matters because it is the only way to God that we have.

Remembrance Sunday of course brings this truth into sharp focus because it both highlights the love which drove many to fight and lose their lives, but not all, and perhaps not even the majority – we are here because we are here because we are here-, and the folly of it all – the deceptions also at play which mean that the nobler desires within us can also leave us susceptible to the wiles and machinations of others less honourably disposed. It's a mixed bag, so great discernment is necessary when we ask ourselves 'what indeed is the next most loving thing to do'.

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