

How does one explain that one is at peace in a world of turmoil without, that is, appearing to be entirely self centred, an 'I'm alright Jack' person, and the world can go to hell for all I care. This applies to any Christian at peace with God and particularly one with a contemplative vocation – Pax after all is at the heart of being a Benedictine. How in short does the spiritual life relate to the material – to the world out there with all its busyness and trauma? Already lots of warning flags should be going up about this way of thinking – all those false opposition's that arise when we compartmentalise reality, when we divide it up into the material and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible, the scientific and factual as opposed to the mystical and hypothetical. All this occasioned by someone at the door asking me how I was and to my reply 'I'm good, thank you, it's all going well' to which he replied 'But the world's terrible, just awful' – with the implicit question: how can you be at peace while this is so. And I'm also thinking here of that phrase of Charles Dickens 'telescopic philanthropy' and of how language can only ever express reality at one remove. This is what I think I mean:

In the wonderful poem of which we only have a part, from the book of proverbs the poet seems to be highlighting all the virtues of a good wife, and, on one level he (or she) is, but it's also a poem highlighting the search for 'Lady Wisdom' – for the peace and spiritual prosperity that comes from pursuing God's will. It's presented in very material terms because we are very material people. It's what the incarnation is all about. We go to the invisible, as it were, through the visible but the mistake is still to imagine that these are two separate worlds, and that the very material language that the poet uses isn't what it's all about after all. The poem works because it's entirely about both. The woman's busyness derives from her being at peace with God and dare one say vice-versa. It's all gift in this sense. When Dickens parodies the woman who is concerned only for the good of those abroad, and the further abroad the better, he is making the point that her care for those at home is negligible. What is needed is both: our care for those who are unknown to us can only be real if we have a care for those with whom we are called to live, call it 'microscopic philanthropy' if you like, for the care, that is, which attends to the detail of daily living, which 'Lady Wisdom' has in spades. This is an expression of her freedom, of her confidence in God, of her confidence that is, in herself that comes from her confidence in God. And it's precisely this confidence that the man with one talent lacks. He's too afraid of God to act freely. This is the peace or lack of, which is at issue in the question posed by the man at the door – not a peace that precludes action but a peace that inspires it – so that the rest of the world does indeed matter but we are not overwhelmed by it. We have something to offer – a peace that goes beyond understanding and which the world so desperately needs and a peace with very real results in this world as well as the next one which only someone wedded to Lady Wisdom will know – but the real test of this knowledge, of knowing Wisdom, of knowing Peace, as a gift of God, will also only come when trauma too comes into one's own life, and is received as gift. What does one say then about Christ's cry from the cross

"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

Perhaps only that he cries out to God.

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