

“The Abbot should always remember what he is, remember what he is called, and realise that of one to whom more is entrusted more is required. Let him realise too how difficult and arduous a task he has undertaken, to rule souls and suit himself to many different characters. Treating one with pleasant humour, another with rebuke, a third with persuasiveness, according to the disposition and understanding of each, he must so adapt himself and fit himself to all that he may suffer no loss in the flock entrusted to him and, not only that, but also have the joy of seeing a good flock increase “ (RB ch.2)

Take note Andy Burnham and anyone who aspires to lead others. King Solomon was acutely aware that the task of leadership demands great wisdom and flexibility: an insight perhaps already indicative that God was at work in him, an instance of the humility necessarily needed if wisdom is to grow, an openness to the Spirit which God will gift to all who desire to serve God, to live in God’s kingdom, to know the way of love. This is the grace of office in which Jesus wishes his disciples to share and teaches them, or perhaps tests them, by parables – not always immediately obvious in their meaning so that they have to put in a little work themselves, to come to an understanding, not least the work or passion even of the search itself for meaning. Do you really want to follow me, then search as I have had to search, through prayer and knowledge of the scriptures. The potential is in you, it’s what you are made for, it’s in essence a recovery of your true self and an insight into the true selves of others. Indeed as we come to know ourselves in all our frailty and weakness we come to know that the divine presence is also to be known there or in the words of Francis Young,

“Meanwhile desire, like fire, needs stoking if it is not to die.

So a discipline of prayer is needed. Furthermore there needs to be a congruence between the external words of scripture, it’s preaching and the prayers of the Church and the internal yearning of the heart.

That congruence comes from the Holy Spirit. And because we are made in God’s image the yearning that reaches out to God is a return to oneself - not in sacred temples and images but in human beings.”

(Francis Young p121 Brokenness and Blessing)

In this sense we are here as gifts for one another. The wisdom that Solomon gains, and is gifted to us through Christ, is not only to discern the intentions of others and so rule them but to receive the gift of God in others and so serve them all the better. When we take from new and old could also be read as what we have to learn from one another, whatever age, race, or cultural background. A passion for God is also a passion for people. Getting to know others is getting to know God.

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