

W E E K L Y M E D I T A T I O N

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

Our scripture reading this week includes this passage from 1 Corinthians. I do not know if it is correct to read a note of exasperation in reading the Apostle's words, but I think I hear that tone of voice.

Here he reminds the Corinthians that they aren't so very special. They may complain about how difficult it is to keep the moral vision of the Gospel - after all, they claim, they are surrounded by worldliness and all kinds of seductive enticements. It is too hard to be good.

The Apostle tells them that they haven't suffered any more than is the common experience of people who live in this fallen world. We are all tempted. And it is hard. But God does not abandon us - although it may seem to us sometimes that He does - and while He permits temptations to harass us - perhaps, as we say, to test us - He does not allow these temptations to be greater than we can possibly bear. Although they can appear overwhelming, the fact is that they are not.

Concerning our struggle with temptations, St Isaac of Syria writes: 'Without temptations, God's concern is not perceived, nor is freedom of speech with Him acquired, nor is spiritual wisdom learnt, nor does the love of God become grounded in the soul.' It is in the encounter with temptation that spiritual realities become real in our lives, and not just nice words and ideas. The believer who struggles experiences the presence and providential care of God, finds real prayer springing to his or her lips, gains the wisdom of experience, knows in fact - and not just theory - the love of God.

The Apostle claims that wherever there is temptation, there is a means of escape. Knowing this is a great help in our Christian struggle (for example in trying to maintain purity or sobriety). Of course the way of escape might be something other than we had wanted and hoped for.

In his *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes: "Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means--the only complete realist."

Fr. Andrew