



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Words for Lent

Jesus is assuming you are going to be strong - that you will be able to carry a cross in his footsteps. St. James assumes your faith will be strong enough to perform good deeds - give food and shelter to the needy - and that you will be able to sacrifice what is most dear to you, like Abraham.

Where do we get this strength? I would like to propose to you a formula.

Only that person is strong who is sure of God's love for him or her. A person sure of God's love can endure all hardships cheerfully, bless enemies, do good to those who hate him, give without hope of return, forgive those who hurt him. He has nothing to lose, being secure in God's love, for "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." Losing his life, he finds it. He is free of self-concern because his heavenly Father takes care of him. He doesn't worship possessions because he is spiritually rich-he has found a treasure in God's friendship, joy, love, peace. He is not ruled by what others think and can see the good in those who are different. He can help others to see the good in themselves.

So how do I become sure of this infinite love for me? By daily meditation on it. Our lives are besieged by distractions. In T. S. Eliot's words, we are "Distracted from distraction by distraction." Everything clamors for your attention: the telephone, the internet, TV, advertising, peer pressure, parental and teacher expectations, self-expectations, emotions and imaginations that run away with us. The one voice that really matters can't get through, until we set aside all of that, maybe for only 5 minutes to start with, let those clamoring voices subside, and open our hearts to the one most sure and stable truth in the world, God's inexhaustible love for you and for every one of his creatures. Of course you know he loves you, you've heard it. But have you let yourself experience it in every fiber of your being? Have you let him love the weak parts of you, the parts you are not proud of? We can get in the way of thinking he will love us when we get our act together, when we can just overcome a certain fault or when we keep his commandments a little better. But that is not the Good News. The Good News is that he loves us now, as we are, with our successes and failures, and is just waiting for us to accept that love. For it is only the acceptance of his love for us as we are, with all that is imperfect, even sinful, that is going to give us the strength to improve in the ways that we know we should.

So what is the formula? Simple. Pray every day, not just words, but heart. Listen for 5 minutes to his message of love for you now. Let it seep into you, ask him for the strength to believe it. His message is always one of unfathomable love. If your mind wanders, it may be helpful to have a Scripture verse to focus on: a verse like "I can do all things with the help of the one who gives me strength."



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Just reflect for a few minutes on the love behind those words. Daily meditation on the Lord's inexhaustible love for you now will make you the strong person you are called to be. Allow the strength to come into you.