

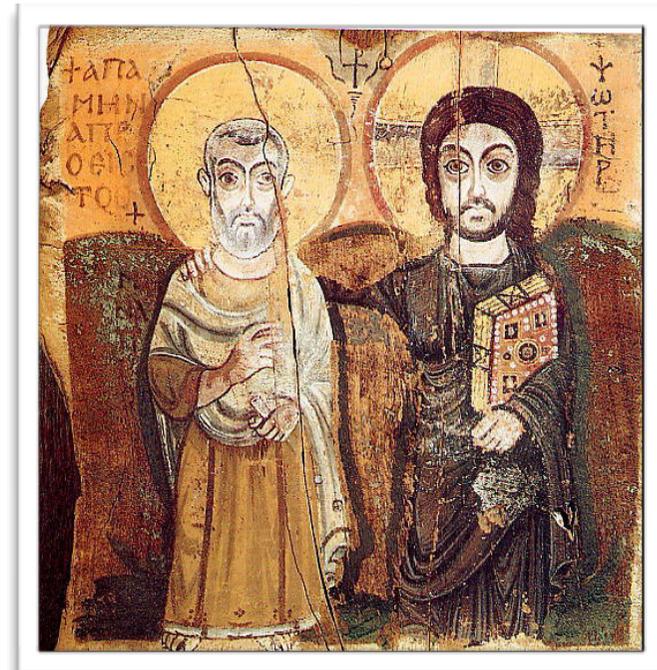
Things to Consider

- ▶ The most important thing for us to do is to try and do the will of God, as we perceive it, moment by moment during the day, with as much generosity as we can manage.
- ▶ Our situation will never be perfect. We will always be busy, distracted, tired or something else. It is important for us just to get on with living our relationship with God and our neighbour despite what else might be happening in our life.
- ▶ We need to consciously work at overcoming our faults asking God to do what we cannot do for ourselves. In the end it will not be what we do, but what God does for us, for we cannot save ourselves. Only He can deal with the roots of sin in our life. That purification from sin is vital though, but it involves repentance on our part.
- ▶ God is always generous and when He sees we are ready and willing to take that next step, whatever it may be, He will give us the necessary grace to take it – if we so choose. He is a generous Lover. We also need to learn to be generous lovers of God and our neighbour.
- ▶ This leads to the truth that there is a direct relationship between our prayer life and our willingness to grow in virtue. This can perhaps be best expressed by saying that we need to grow in the fruit of the Spirit which as St Paul says, 'is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control'. (Galatians 5.22-23)
- ▶ And finally – never give up!

AtG/B6/MBH

Attending to God

‘Responding to difficulties with prayer ...’



We have been trying to 'Attend to God' but how difficult it can be. We wonder if perhaps we are deluding ourselves: is it just our imagination? Is there anybody there? Have we lost our way? Are we going backwards? (And yes, sometimes we all do go backwards.) Many questions and few if any, answers ...

Part of our problem is that God is beyond our imagination and understanding. Isaiah writes these words for God: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' (55.8-9)

And yet despite all this struggling and difficulty, something impels us onwards; we know deep within that we cannot give up, and in fact don't want to give up, despite our frustration at times. Somehow we recognise we are not deluded and it is not our imagination, but we could never prove it.

A few verses before that passage from Isaiah, we are told by God, 'Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.' (55.3) So perhaps it is that we need to listen in a new and deeper way in our heart, informed by our mind. The Letter to the Ephesians at one point asks that '... the eyes of your heart may be enlightened ...' (3.18)

One problem that can occur when we struggle, is that we try too hard. It's as if we need to relax our grip on our life of prayer, our relationship with God. It is not that we should become slack, but that we just need to release our grip and relax into that relationship. An illustration may help.

Belden Lane quotes from Peter Matthiessen's book *The Snow Leopard*. Matthiessen tells how very few Western people have seen a snow leopard in the wild and usually when it happens it is by accident. Mostly it occurs when people are observing the bharal, or blue sheep, on which the leopard feeds. Those who go in search of the snow leopard usually don't see one even if it is only a few metres away. It is when they cease focussing on the leopard and focus on the sheep that they may be fortunate enough to see one.

And so for us, when we try to focus too closely on God we can miss Him. We are left struggling and feeling somewhat frustrated by His seeming absence when we are trying so hard.

Instead we need to loosen our grip and just get on with being faithful in our attentiveness to Him and not be bothered by this struggling and frustration, remembering that the Holy Spirit prays in us. (Romans 8.26-27) In fact the work of the Holy Spirit in us is the key; our task is to cooperate. This means in practice, maintaining our life of prayer (just doing it!) and living out our relationship with our neighbours.

Yes, we will struggle with all this but just give it time, working at it, never giving up. Alcoholics Anonymous use a good one-liner which can help us in our struggling, particularly when we wonder whether it's all worthwhile, or whether our life is just a pretense: 'Fake it until you make it.' That's not a bad approach!

On the cover you will notice a very beautiful sixth century icon of Christ and Abba Menas, a Coptic saint. Originally this was in the Apa Apolla monastery in Egypt, which was founded in the late fourth century and had about 500 monks. Following the Islamic invasion the monastery declined and was abandoned around the tenth century. Today this icon is in the Louvre.

What you notice is that Menas is giving the priestly blessing, which is Christ's blessing, and seemingly unaware that Christ is beside him with His arm around his shoulder. Even though Christ remains unseen to Menas there is an obvious holiness with him that people must have recognised in his life, for he has been given a halo.

That too, is our story. Christ walks with us even though we may be unaware of that presence. Take heart in Christ's presence, even when unseen. Allow God to shine through you and shape you. In the words of St Paul, 'Be aglow with the Spirit.' (Romans 12.11) and may this Light shining through you draw others to Him.