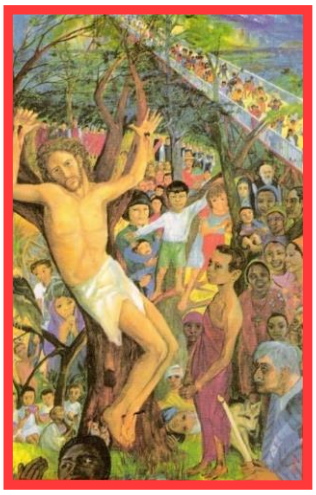
Meditation: Wisdom and the Cross 9.3.22 Sr Marie

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in the physical space of the meditation room at Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.
So, a very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, and Hazel, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: O God of our Fathers, acknowledging the great need I have of your Divine Wisdom, I come before you today, to beg this grace of you with all possible earnestness and the greatest humility. Send us O Lord, this Wisdom which sits by your throne, to strengthen our weakness, to enlighten our minds, to inflame our hearts, to speak and to act, to work and suffer in union with you, to direct our footsteps and to fill our souls with the virtues of Jesus Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit for only Wisdom can bring us these gifts.
O Father of mercy, God of all consolation, we ask you for this infinite treasure of your Divine Wisdom. Hear and grant our prayers. Amen *St Louis-Marie de Montfort*



Introduction: All the major religions of our world address the problem of suffering because they recognize it as a characteristic of the human condition. As Christians, we address this aspect of life through the symbol of the Cross. But it is very important to recognize that: the cross is always *associated with* suffering but *is not* limited to suffering; it transcends suffering. I am going to use some of the writings of St Louis Marie de Montfort, our founder who lived in the 17th Century. Montfort had an original presentation of the story of Adam and Eve which represents a very creative aspect of his work. For a new vision of the 'Fall' of Adam and Eve it is useful to begin by reflecting on his description of the first man and woman. We find these texts in his book *Love of Eternal Wisdom,* which is an overview of his Spirituality. When Montfort refers to Wisdom he is referring to Eternal Wisdom that has existed from all eternity (Proverbs 8) and Jesus, the incarnation of Wisdom (Jn 1).This part is entitled Original Blessings:

"If the power and the sweetness of Wisdom shine forth so brilliantly in the beauty and order of the universe, how much more evident are these qualities in the creation of humankind! For the human being indeed is Wisdom's supreme creation, the living image of Her beauty and perfection, the most excellent container of Her grace and of Her treasures – Her unique representative on earth. In your Wisdom you have so designed human beings that they are able to rule the creatures that you have made. (This recalls the OT theology of humanity's 'domination' over nature. Today we are in the process of trying to come to grips with a new story of humanity's relationship to the web of life, affirming the idea of stewardship.) *I wish I could honour properly Wisdom's glory as well as the beauty and power of Her handiwork, I wish I could describe suitably the original beauty and excellence of the first humans who received their gifts fresh from Her hand. Figuratively speaking, we could say that in the human being, Wisdom created a likeness and a brilliant expression of her own understanding, memory, and will. She implanted these three powers in human beings so that they could be the living portrait of divinity. In their hearts she kindled a fire of pure love of God. She created their bodies shining and full of light. In the most compact way possible she incorporated in them all the different qualities of angels, of animals, and of all other creatures. In the original humans, everything was radiant without*

shadow, beautiful without defect, and pure without stain. All was harmonious without trace of discord, strain, or the slightest imperfection. The light of Wisdom illumined their minds so that they knew perfectly the Creator and all creatures. The grace of God completely filled their souls, so that they stood innocent and pleasing before the Most High. In their bodies, they were gifted with immortality. In their hearts, which was free from any fear of death, they had a chaste love by which they loved God constantly, purely, and unconditionally for God's own sake. So divinely created were they that they lived in God in a continuous state of boundless joy, having no passion to overcome, and no enemy to defend themselves against. O the generosity of Divine Wisdom towards humanity! LEW 35-38

Montfort then has a poetic way of expressing the fall of human beings from this original state:

How great then is humanity's misfortune! The divine vessel is broken into a thousand pieces; the beautiful star falls from its heights; the sun is covered with the mud of earth. Adam and Eve sin and lose their innocence, beauty, and immortality. Indeed, having lost all the blessings they have received, they become subject to countless ills. Their spirit becomes dull and confused so that they no longer have understanding; their hearts freeze so that they no longer love God; their souls, now tarnished by sin, appear almost demon-like; with their passions fallen into disorder they can no longer control themselves. Even the other creatures have become enemies who attack them. In one brief moment the human being becomes the slave of demons, the object of God's anger, and the target of the powers of destruction. In their own eyes they appear so deep in shame that they go off to hide themselves. Cursed and condemned to death, they have been thrown out of the earthly paradise, and have lost their home in the heavens. They are destined to lead a desperate life on the resistant earth without hope of ever regaining happiness. Nothing can repair their condition since by their sin all that was in them had been so beautifully designed and created has now become twisted and covered in filth. Barred from paradise and from the presence of God, they and their descendants remain under the firm judgment of God's justice. The gate of heaven has been closed, and there is no one to open it. The gate of hell has been opened, and there is no one to close it. # 39-40

There is only one sentence among these numbers of LEW that echoes the traditional theology normally referred to by preachers. "*In one brief moment man becomes the slave of demons, the object of God's anger, and the target of the powers of hell."* All the rest of the passage consists of expressions of regret for the ***losses*** suffered by Adam and Eve: their painful ***separation*** from God and the isolation that comes from it, the ***distance*** and ***disharmony*** created between the two humans and the rest of the earth; the ***enormous gap*** and ***discord*** created between them and other earthly creatures, their ***future deprived of all hope as,*** figuratively speaking the gate of heaven the gate of heaven is closed; the gate of hell is open. Hell is seen not so much as a place of punishment but of shadow, lifelessness, a sense of something missing.

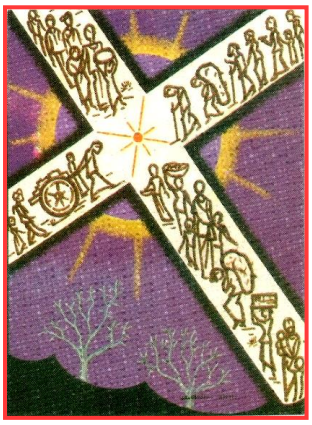
Wisdom's Reaction: The first thing to note is that Wisdom's reaction corresponds, point by point, with the pain and suffering of Adam and Eve. Wisdom responds to their agony and is terribly saddened by the destruction of so much beauty and goodness. Tenderly, she opens her ears to their cries of grief. Full of compassion, she sees their tears. '*Eternal Wisdom is deeply touched by the misfortune of Adam and of all his descendants. It is with the greatest dismay that She sees Her vessel of honour broken, Her divine portrait made ugly, Her masterpiece destroyed, and Her closest image on earth overthrown. Tenderly She listens to Adam and Eve's broken-hearted cries. With pity She looks upon the sweat of their brow, the tears in their eyes, the straining of their shoulders, the sorrows and affliction of their heart and soul.* LEW 41
Beginning with Wisdom's spontaneous reaction of compassion, Montfort develops his three famous paragraphs about the 'Council of the Trinity'. The fact that Montfort begins each of these three phrases with "*it seems to me*" hints that we are not obliged to take these paragraphs in a strictly literal sense.

<u>In my mind's eye I can almost see</u> this lovable Queen convoking for a second time, as it were, a council of the Blessed Trinity. During the earlier corresponding gathering, the dialogue had, of course, centred upon the creation of humankind. This time it will consider the possibility of restoring humanity to its former

communion with God. It seems to me that in this new great council meeting there takes place a sort of contest between Eternal Wisdom and God's Justice. It seems to me that Wisdom makes the point that, even though human beings by reason of their sin deserve the just condemnation which they share with the fallen angels, still it is right also to be merciful to them, for they have sinned not so much out of bad will, as through ignorance and weakness. On the one hand, She insists, it would be a great pity if this masterpiece of her creation were to be subject forever to the hostile powers, and that millions of descendants should be lost forever because of the sin of a single human ancestor. On the other hand, She points out the places in heaven left vacant by the rebel angels, hinting that the time may be at hand to fill them again. She finishes by suggesting the great glory that would be given to God in time and in eternity if humankind could be saved. It seems to me that I can hear the response of the voice of Justice arguing in turn that the decree of condemnation has already been pronounced against the whole race of humankind because Justice requires that sin should be punished. Seeing clearly that there is no power in the universe able to make up for the sin of Adam or soften the Justice and the Anger of God, yet still wishing to save humans, whom She Herself simply loves, Wisdom finds Her own amazing way out of the deadlock. Unbelievably, out of the limitless generosity of Her love, She offers this unimaginable solution: She herself will become the sacred offering required to make peace with the Father, to satisfy His justice, to calm down His anger, to rescue us from slavery and to win for us an eternity of blessed joy. LEW 42-45

The two most difficult phrases in the above text are these: *It seems to me that in this new great council meeting there takes place a sort of contest between Eternal Wisdom and God's Justice. For this statement*, there really does not seem to be a struggle between Wisdom and the Father. It is preferable to understand it as a choice between compassion and justice – and this choice is made by all three members of the Trinity. For the whole Trinity is involved in the choice made for the Cross. Moreover, this choice is fundamentally a **choice to express love to the uttermost** – by sharing and healing the agony of the human condition.

The second difficult phrase is the following*: She herself will become the sacred offering required to make peace with the Father, to satisfy His justice, to calm down His anger, to rescue us from slavery to the demonic powers and the fires of hell, and to win for us an eternity of blessed joy. For this statement,* Montfort is quoting here the theology of St. Anselm, that Christ offered himself as a payment, a ransom. The emphasis is placed on paying back, of making satisfaction with an angry God, a theology of salvation that has been dominant in the Church since the 11th century and an idea featuring in many hymns we still use. But in LEW it is clear that the strongest and most original intuition that Montfort had was that of the tenderness and compassion of Eternal Wisdom in her choice of the cross, as a way of showing how genuine her love truly is.



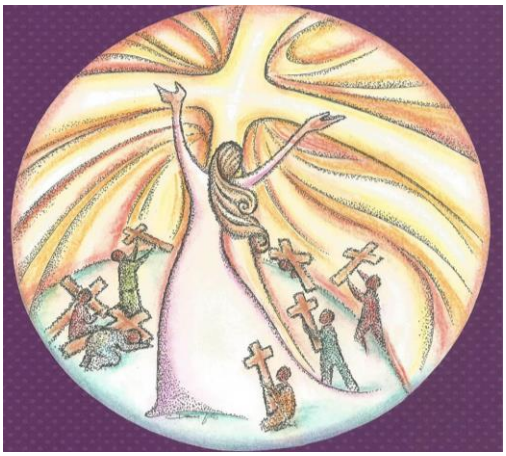
Towards an Understanding of the Cross: In other numbers of LEW, Wisdom's tenderness is shown to be completely compatible with her choice to become incarnate and to go even further, by entering fully into human suffering. Montfort's emphasis on ***Wisdom's desire for humanity***: "My delight is to be with the children of humanity" Pr. 8:31; Wisdom's ***presence and action*** in every period of salvation history… "*To these we may add all those who were delivered by Eternal Wisdom from great danger both in the Old and the New Testaments.*" Ws. 9; ***the corresponding desires of human beings for Wisdom***: "*I loved Wisdom and sought her from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride*." Ws 8:2. In the following sentence from the modern point of view, the dates are wildly inaccurate. However, Montfort was relying on the scholarship available to him from before the 18th century. "*Thus we can see why, for the length of the four thousand years from the creation of the world to the Incarnation, all the saints of the Old Law were praying for the coming of the Messiah. With sighs of deepest desire, they uttered their pleas, crying out…O clouds, rain down the Just One! O Earth bud forth the Saviour." Is 45:8.*

And so we can say that the Cross is the love, the presence, and the saving action of Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom in the midst of the suffering of humankind and of the universe

Of all the reasons I can think of that move us to the love of Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, the strongest, in my opinion, lies in the sorrows He was willing to undergo to show His love for us. The work of our redemption that touches our hearts so deeply, the supreme gift and the incredible evidence of Your love that ***wins our hearts*** *so easily, that* ***attracts us*** *so tenderly, that* ***challenges us*** *so precisely, that* ***binds us to You*** *so closely, that* ***affects us*** *so powerfully.* LEW 154

Beginning Meditation: I invite you now to bring a compassionate attention to how you are sitting so that your body can be alert, yet comfortable, and ready to listen to the Lord. After taking a couple of deeper, settling breaths, let your breath find its own soothing rhythm. Gently encourage your mind to slow down and settle as you prepare to pray and to plunge into the arms of Wisdom who loves you so much. You might like to use a favourite phrase to repeat during this time.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…
Bell Sounds…Meditation ends



Post Meditation: With the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the cross takes on a new and completely different meaning and significance. Instead of being an instrument of torture associated with suffering, the Cross becomes the glory and pride of every Christian. Through faith, it actually gives birth to a sense of joyful certainty and profound thanksgiving that moves us to say with the Apostle Paul: "*But as for me, God forbid that I should boast of anything at all, except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ…"* (Gal 6:14) Nevertheless, we should never lose sight of the fact that in the gospels the passion and death of Christ form the central teaching toward which everything else is oriented for the whole gospel has to be reread in the light of Easter. It is precisely from this perspective, with our eyes fixed on the horizon of the Resurrection that we speak of the cross even today.

Time of personal prayer

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God… **Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Resources: Montfort, St Louis Marie Grignion de, *Love of Eternal Wisdom, 1703*
Daughters of Wisdom*, Wisdom and the Cross July 2009,*



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