

Recovering a sense of wonder

To me, the most delightful thing about young children is their sense of wonder at the mere existence of things in the world out there. It is a joy to watch babies begin to reach out and take hold of things – even parts of their own body – and gaze at them not so much in curiosity as in awe, then burst into a happy giggle, radiating pure delight.

My experience as a teacher for many years is that this capacity for wonders stays with children for a long time, at least to some extent, all the way up through elementary school. Gradually however, we all come to take the existence of things for granted, and our focus shifts from wonder that things are to curiosity about what things are, how they work, and how we can manipulate them. This is, of course, a natural transition: as adults we rarely experience that wonder at the fact that that anything exists at all, we are just too busy.

A healthy spiritual life though depends on our recovering and cultivating that sense of wonder, because only when we are open to it are we able to truly encounter God. The awe we experienced as infants was, in fact, our first encounter with him, the source, the well-spring of our faith. That is what Jesus is talking about when he says: *“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”* (Luke 18:17)

The recovery of that first simple awareness of God, which fills us with awe and wonder is the ultimate goal of the spiritual practice of meditation and contemplative prayer, not only in the Christian tradition but also in all the major faiths. It something we all need to aspire to, and I’ll be sharing some thoughts about how we do that in the coming weeks.

From the Desert Fathers

A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again,' and the hunter replied 'If I bend my bow so much I will break it.' Then the old man said to him, 'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.'

Psalm 1

Response: *Happy are they who delight in the law of the Lord.*

1 BLESSED is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, * and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord; * and in his law will he exercise himself day and night.

Response: *Happy are they who delight in the law of the Lord.*

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, * that will bring forth his fruit in due season. 4 His leaf also shall not wither; * and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper.

Response: *Happy are they who delight in the law of the Lord.*

5 As for the ungodly, it is not so with them; * but they are like the chaff, which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth. 6 Therefore the ungodly shall not be able to stand in the judgment, * neither the sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 7 But the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; * and the way of the ungodly shall perish.

Response: *Happy are they who delight in the law of the Lord.*

SAINTS:

Allen Gardiner, Founder of the South American Missionary Society, 6 September.

Allen Francis Gardiner was born in 1794 and joined the Royal Navy as a young man. He resigned in 1826 and, on the death of his wife in 1834, dedicated himself to missionary work. He pioneered a mission to the Zulus in South Africa for the Church Missionary Society and founded the city of Durban. He then went to South America to investigate the possibility of evangelism amongst the indigenous tribes. He travelled extensively and founded the South American Missionary Society in 1844. With seven other missionaries, he died of starvation in 1851 on the shores of Tierra del Fuego.

The Birth of the Blessèd Virgin Mary, 8 September. This festival in honour of the birth of the mother of our Lord is celebrated on this day in both the eastern and the western Churches. Falling just nine months after the feast of the Conception of Mary, this feast acknowledges the preparation by God of his people to receive their Saviour and Lord, putting 'heaven in ordinary' and showing that mortal flesh can be the bearer of Christ to the world.