

Monday 28th March
2022

Meditation 27



There are no words to describe the horror of the war in Ukraine, caused by the invasion of Russian troops. The sufferings unleashed on a sovereign state are virtually unpardonable.

As in all wars, truth is the first victim, smothered in clouds of propaganda, lies, subterfuge and deception. But all war is evil. Nothing can justify the killing of a single person in order to obtain a few meters of ground. War is the ultimate failure of humanity. The most tragic outcome of war is that both sides lose. There are no victors. The aggressors are diminished in the sight of the world for their arrogance. But time takes the ultimate victory, as those who cause war

perish, falling into the same dust of the earth where they put their victims.

War has always been part of human history. The biblical prophet Micah, writing in the 7th century BC, looked forward to the end of a local war. He poetically forecast:

'God will judge between many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Micah 4:3).

In the meantime, all who live in relative peace must come to the aid of the victims of war.

A large bronze statue stands near the United Nations building in New York. The work, by the Ukrainian artist Yevgeny Viktorovich Vuchetich, (1908-74) was commissioned in 1957 from the union of Socialist Republics. The artist was born in Imperial Russia, lived through the Revolution, the First and Second World War and his homeland is now part of Ukraine.

The statue, inspired by the prophet Micah, shows a robust man beating his implements of war into farming implements. The instruments of death thus become the tools of new life and survival.

Tuesday 29th March
2022

Meditation 28



The great Chinese philosopher Confucius (c 551 BC- 479) founded a school to teach future generations how to be honorable members of society. Although he was largely unsuccessful in his lifetime as a teacher, two and half thousand years after his death, his teachings reverberate with common sense and his counsel is followed by millions. Soon after his death, his followers collected his sayings in the *Analects*.

Confucius wanted to unite the country, which was in a state of turmoil, by using the same qualities which gave life to the family. He observed that the State is nothing less than the family writ large. For 14 years, Confucius travelled with a small band of followers to neighboring states to find a good ruler. He failed in his search.

In order to survive and flourish, families learn many qualities. It is too idealistic to believe that all the members of a family will live happily united. World literature abounds in tales of revenge, jealousy, deceit, rejection and murder. Confucius once cautioned “Before you set out on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.”

For society to grow peacefully, Confucius taught, many qualities need to be fostered. Respect, devotion, constancy, forgiveness, tolerance and loyalty are the fundamental stepping stones towards a serene life. His most famous saying is “That which you do not desire be done to you, avoid doing to others.”

Thursday 31st March
2022

Meditation 30

I bet you checked out the page where the art should be, right?

I confess I played a trick today. But I have a good reason.

Did you ever wonder what your soul looks like? When I was a child, about six or seven, Miss Bath of St. Ann's School was preparing my class for First Holy Communion. One of my classmates asked Miss Bath what our souls looked like. She took the white cardboard which was in every chocolate Picnic Bar, a favorite in those days (and still is today!). She had probably eaten one a few minutes earlier.

"This, children," she said solemnly "is what your soul looks like. We all peered up at the small card. It certainly looked very white

from where I was sitting. "And when we sin," she continued confidently "its like little pieces of brown chocolate are on the white card."

I digested that piece of spiritual information. Obviously the main thing was to go through life without getting any chocolate on your soul.

Years later, the penny dropped. Miss Bath was using an analogy. The card merely represented the invisible soul. But the idea was clear. We need to keep our souls clean of sin and pristine. That way we can hand them back to God in Heaven. It's easier said than done. There are a lot of pollutants in the world of today. We need the constant help of a spiritual extractor fan!

Today, some three million descendants trace their lineage back to their common ancestor, Confucius, through 86 generations. They are proud of this heritage, one of the oldest in civilization, because Confucius claimed that the family is at the basis of every successful human endeavor.

*Two graves in St. Paulinus Graveyard,
Crawford, photographed by Ethan
Doyle White.*

Wednesday 29th March
2022

Meditation 29

The Death of the Miser





Jesus said to His disciples: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

From the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 12 verses 15-221



The Death of the Miser, Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516)

In the Samuel H. Kress Collection, The National Gallery of Art, Washington

Thursday 31st March
2022

Meditation 30

I bet you checked out the page where the art should be, right?

I confess I played a trick today. But I have a good reason.

Did you ever wonder what your soul looks like? When I was a child, about six or seven, Miss Bath of St. Ann's School was preparing my class for First Holy Communion. One of my classmates asked Miss Bath what our souls looked like. She took the white cardboard which was in every chocolate Picnic Bar, a favorite in those days (and still is today!). She had probably eaten one a few minutes earlier.

"This, children," she said solemnly "is what your soul looks like. We all peered up at the small card. It certainly looked very white

from where I was sitting. "And when we sin," she continued confidently "its like little pieces of brown chocolate are on the white card."

I digested that piece of spiritual information. Obviously the main thing was to go through life without getting any chocolate on your soul.

Years later, the penny dropped. Miss Bath was using an analogy. The card merely represented the invisible soul. But the idea was clear. We need to keep our souls clean of sin and pristine. That way we can hand them back to God in Heaven. It's easier said than done. There are a lot of pollutants in the world of today. We need the constant help of a spiritual extractor fan!

Friday 1st April 2022

Meditation 31



In ancient Egypt, the heart was regarded as the most important organ. After death, the body was embalmed and most of the organs were removed from the body. The brain was removed by inserting a rod through the nose. The stomach organs were also removed and placed in canopic jars. The heart alone was left in the body.

The process of embalming took 70 days, and the body was dried using salts. At the end of the period the body was placed in a series of wooden or metal coffins and carried to the tomb. The priests who oversaw the ritual embalming, inserted amulets and a hieroglyphic text into the folds of the shroud.

The amulets were intended to defend the deceased from any attack, such as tomb-raiders or beetles or insects which might consume the remains. The text, called “The Summoning from the Dark into the Light” contained a series of drawing and prayers. One of these shows the weighing of the heart

For the ancient Egyptians, the heart was the seat of the intellect, the will, the memory and the emotions. Therefore the heart had to be examined by the god Anubis and questioned. On top of the scales crouches Maat, the goddess of order and of truth.

The deceased is led to the Underworld for judgment. The heart is placed on a scale by Anubis who then places a feather on the second scale. The heart then says that it has never done wrong. It says, for example, that it has never polluted the waters of the Nile, or stole the property of another person. The heart cannot lie, as it always tells the truth. Therefore the deceased hopes that the heart will not “bear bad witness.” If it does, the god takes the heart from the scale and feeds it to the god Ammit, a monstrous animal made part lion, part crocodile and part rhinoceros. If the heart betrays the deceased, the journey to the afterworld ends.

If the heart has borne “good witness” then the person is presented to the god Osiris who grants admittance to the Afterlife. Curiously, the afterlife is the same for everybody: the opportunity to tend crops on the fertile banks of the River Nile.

There is much to think about here, but it is thought-provoking to consider that all of us are formed from the earth and in the end we all return. Whether rich or poor, young or old, we are all the same.

Illustration from the *Book of Ani*, (c.1240 BC) in the British Museum.

Saturday 2 April
2022
Meditation 32



The icon is a modern version of Our Lady of Kyiv. Painted in Constantinople in the mid-12th century, the icon was brought to Kyiv in Ukrainia and now is in Russia. Jesus wraps an arm around His mother's neck, and looks into her eyes. She, meanwhile, gazes at the viewer, her eyes locking with ours.

On 25th March, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis consecrated Ukrainia and Russia to the protection of the Blessed Virgin. The following is an extract from his prayer.

O Mary, Mother of God and our mother, in this time of trial we turn to you. As our mother, you love us and know us: No concern of our hearts is hidden from you. Mother of mercy, how often we have experienced your watchful care and your peaceful presence! You never cease to guide us to Jesus, the prince of peace. Yet we have strayed from that path of peace. We have forgotten the lesson learned from the tragedies of the last century, the sacrifice of the millions who fell in two world wars. We have disregarded the commitments we made as a community of nations. We have betrayed peoples' dreams of peace and the hopes of the young. We grew sick with greed, we thought only of our own nations and their interests, we grew indifferent and caught up in our selfish needs and concerns.

We chose to ignore God, to be satisfied with our illusions, to grow arrogant and aggressive, to suppress innocent lives and to stockpile weapons. We stopped being our neighbor's keepers and stewards of our common home. We have ravaged the garden of the earth with war, and by our sins we have broken the heart of our heavenly Father, who desires us to be brothers and sisters. We grew indifferent to everyone and everything except ourselves.

Now with shame we cry out: Forgive us,
Lord!

Holy Mother, amid the misery of our
sinfulness, amid our struggles and
weaknesses, amid the mystery of
iniquity that is evil and war, you remind
us that God never abandons us, but
continues to look upon us with love,
ever ready to forgive us and raise us up
to new life. He has given you to us and
made your Immaculate Heart a refuge
for the church and for all humanity. By
God's gracious will, you are ever with
us; even in the most troubled moments
of our history, you are there to guide us
with tender love.

We now turn to you and knock at the door of your heart. We are your beloved children. In every age you make yourself known to us, calling us to conversion. At this dark hour, help us and grant us your comfort. Say to us once more: "Am I not here, I who am your Mother?" You are able to untie the knots of our hearts and of our times. In you we place our trust. We are confident that, especially in moments of trial, you will not be deaf to our supplication and will come to our aid.

That is what you did at Cana in Galilee, when you interceded with Jesus and he worked the first of his signs. To preserve the joy of the wedding feast, you said to him: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). Now, O Mother, repeat those words and that prayer, for in our own day we have run out of the wine of hope, joy has fled, fraternity has faded. We have forgotten our humanity and squandered the gift of peace. We opened our hearts to violence and destructiveness. How greatly we need your maternal help!

Therefore, O Mother, hear our
prayer.

Star of the Sea, do not let us be
shipwrecked in the tempest of war.

Ark of the New Covenant, inspire
projects and paths of reconciliation.

Queen of Heaven, restore God's
peace to the world.

Eliminate hatred and the thirst for
revenge, and teach us forgiveness.

Free us from war, protect our world
from the menace of nuclear
weapons.

Queen of the Rosary, make us
realize our need to pray and to love.

Queen of the Human Family, show
people the path of fraternity.

Queen of Peace, obtain peace for our
world. Amen.

Sunday 3rd April 2022

Meditation 33



The painting by Aert de Gelder (1683) is in the Museo Nacional Thyssen- Bournemisza in Madrid. The woman hides her face in her hands as she kneels before Jesus. The Master listens to a man who accuses the woman of adultery.

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

From Chapter 8 of the Gospel According to St. John

The most common description of this episode, recorded in Chapter 8 of St. John's Gospel is "The Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery."

The very title shows bigotry and gender discrimination. Why concentrate on the anonymous woman? What about the man? Do we know anything about him? Was he an honorable and upright married man, or a lad about town? Why not call this "The Man Caught in the Act of Adultery? The title might give it away- he didn't get caught.

Most cultures have a sorry history of misogyny. For generations women were committed to workhouses and their children placed in orphanages until they could be given to more "respectable"

parents. In the Catholic Church, such behavior was not only tolerated, sometimes supported by Religious Orders which cared for the children and mothers.

It is true of wider society. Thomas Coram's celebrated Foundling Hospital in London, built to house abandoned waifs in the mid-18th century, catered for the off-spring of fathers unwilling to take responsibility for their children. To make matters worse, the children were branded illegitimate, thus barring them employment prospects and even denying them the right to marriage.

The dialogue between Jesus and the nameless woman is not found in the earliest versions of St. John's Gospel, and one wonders why. Did the editor decide the story was too uncomfortable for readers newly- converted to Christianity?

While we welcome the gracious words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus, we do well to see parts of our lives where we sin against others, and allow society to forgive us, rather than doing the right thing in God's sight.

The old English proverb is apt: "It ill-behoves the most of us to judge ill of the rest of us."