

The Art of Happiness - A Silent Retreat

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A Silent Retreat Led By Fr Laurence Freeman OSB

Benedictine monk Laurence Freeman on Jan 26-28 conducted a silent retreat on The Art of Happiness, an introduction to, as well as deepening of, the practice of contemplative prayer or meditation. For many of the 185 participants, who included Catholics and non-Catholics, this was their first experience of a silent retreat. During the free periods for reflection they wandered or sat quietly in the pleasant courtyards, green nooks, and shady corners of the Trinity Theological College in Upper Bukit Timah Road.

"Fr Laurence's talks showed me the spiritual reality of the Beatitudes," one participant said. "If you faithfully meditate each day, humbly persevering without judging or looking for success, you become more accepting and loving of yourself and others -- and this is really the way to happiness. I realise that when I am contented with the little things I have, I'll be happy... joy is always there, even when the teardrops fall."

Fr Laurence, who is based in London and Director of the WCCM (World Community for Christian Meditation), made succinct, memorable points – with his trademark clarity and simplicity. Happiness does not come from the satisfaction of desires, he said, which only make us long for what will not satisfy.

Self-knowledge – including the oft-neglected practice of contemplative wisdom - is crucial to happiness. To develop our spirituality, the way to happiness, we should go beyond words and meditate, a time when we are embraced by the mystery of God. Other religions eg Hinduism also discovered this humble worship of God in contemplative prayer. Indeed, self-knowledge & knowledge of God have common ground – a human being fully alive displays the glory of God. True happiness is inherent in our nature and already resides in each of us. It is not satisfied by materialistic desire but springs from the knowledge of God within us. This knowledge, found through meditation, enables us to become happier day by day.

Referring to the trend of worshipping designer brands, he said branded goods had become our idols – to show off (despite the reality that the stronger the brand's power the more the product decreases in quality). On the contrary, in meditation, we dissolve all the images of God, paying no attention to these. God is truth versus the spin or hype created by brands.

He ended by assuring the community that the constant practice of meditation creates an awareness of a cycle of events or states of mind, giving us anchorage in times of turbulence, so that we are not cast adrift and blown around. Meditation helps us to keep going, once we are aware of being in this cycle.