

Reflection from the *'Little Book of Lent'* – an anthology composed by Reverend Canon Arthur Howells (2014, London: Harper Collins) comprising extracts from several of his favourite spiritual writers and reproduced here with his kind permission.

1. Wednesday, Week Three

For Reflection

Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996) a Dutch Catholic priest, spent twenty years teaching in the Netherlands and the United States while giving the final years of his life to teaching and ministering at the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto. A prolific writer, his books include The Wounded Healer, The Return of the Prodigal Son, Here and Now and The Way of the Heart. This extract is from Here and Now.

From Mind to Heart

How do we concretely go about setting our hearts on God's kingdom? When I lay in my bed, not able to fall asleep because of my many worries, when I do my work preoccupied about all the things that can go wrong, when I can't get my mind off my concern for a dying friend – what am I supposed to do? Set my heart on the kingdom? Fine, but how does one do this?

There are as many answers to this question as there are people with different lifestyles, personalities, and external circumstances. There is not one specific answer that fits everyone's needs. But there are some answers that can offer helpful directions.

One simple answer is to move from the mind to the heart by slowly saying a prayer with as much attentiveness as possible. This may sound like offering a crutch to someone who asks you to heal a broken leg. The truth, however, is that a prayer, prayed from the heart, heals. When you know the Our Father, the Apostles' Creed, the Glory be to the Father by heart, you have something to start with. You might like to learn by heart the Twenty-third psalm: 'The Lord is my shepherd' or Paul's words about love to the Corinthians or St. Francis' prayer: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...' As you lie in your bed, drive your car, wait for the bus, or walk your dog, you can slowly let the words of one of these prayers go through your mind simply trying to listen with your whole being to what they are saying. You will be constantly distracted by your worries, but if you keep going back to the words of the prayer, you will gradually discover that your worries become less obsessive and that you really start to enjoy praying. And as the prayer descends from your mind into the centre of your being you will discover its healing power.

HERE AND NOW
HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

Scripture Reading

St Matthew 11:25-30

"I will give you rest"

Prayer:

O thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart.

There let us for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return
in humble prayer and fervent praise
CHARLES WESLEY (1707-1788)