

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.

6. Monday, Week Four

For Reflection

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal. In 1960, after resigning from the teaching profession because of the Bantu Education Act, he was ordained as an Anglican priest. In 1975 he was appointed as the first black Dean of Johannesburg. He was Bishop of Lesotho from 1976 to 1978, Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches (1978-1986) and Archbishop of Cape Town from 1986 until his retirement in 1996. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. He is the author of several collections of sermons and numerous books. The extract that follows is from God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for our Time.

Being a Centre of Love

Prayer and holy words can bring us back to our love and our recognition of connectedness. St Paul tells us to pray unceasingly and many Christians have used the Jesus Prayer as a way to create inner stillness at times of anger and turmoil. The form of the prayer has varied, but the most common form is 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Some have suggested simply saying 'Lord Jesus, have mercy,' or repeating a verse from the Psalms, a quote from the Bible, or another prayer that is meaningful and significant to you and your beliefs.

If more of us could serve as centres of love and oases of peace, we might just be able to turn around a great deal of the conflict, the hatred, the jealousies, and the violence. This is a way that we can take on the suffering and transform it. Let us watch our tongues. We can so easily hurt one another. Our harsh words can extinguish a weak, flickering light. It is far too easy to discourage, all too easy to criticize, to complain, to rebuke. Let us try instead to see even a small amount of good in a person and concentrate on that. Let us be quicker to praise than to find fault. Let us be quicker to thank others than to complain. Let us be gentle with God's children.

I'm coming to believe more and more in the truth that everything we do has consequences. A good deed doesn't just evaporate and disappear. Its consequences saturate the universe and the goodness that happens somewhere, anywhere, helps in the transfiguration of the ugliness. But also it is true that a bad deed – or what the Bible calls sin – doesn't just evaporate and disappear, its consequences saturate the universe, too.

We all lose part of our humanity, of our divinity when we sin – when we betray our sacred relationship with one another or with God. When you sin, you feel awful. Because in many ways you end up knowing that it is not in your best interest, ultimately, and that often someone is going to be hurt by what you do. We often think of sin as a violation of religious or moral law or as an offense against God. But we sin whenever we are less than we should be when we miss the mark of our potential to be fully loving and caring human beings. These smaller sins also need forgiveness, as of course do the larger violations of one another's humanity and holiness. But asking for forgiveness requires humility, as does granting forgiveness.

GOD HAS A DREAM
DESMOND TUTU

Scripture Reading
1 John 3:18-24

'Love one another'

Prayer

Suffering Lord,
heal our wounds.

Compassionate Christ,
teach us love.

Good Shepherd,
seek and save us.

Crucified Jesus,
forgive our sins.

Risen Lord,
renew our faith.

Ascended Christ,
reign in us
now and always.