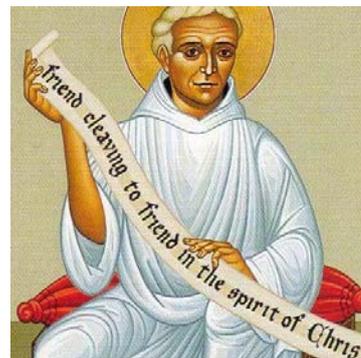


Prayer of the Month • December 2017 • Aelred of Rievaulx

Lord, sometimes I wonder away from you. But this is not because I am deliberately turning my back on you. It is because of the inconstancy of my mind. I weaken in my intention to give my whole soul to you. I fall back in to thinking of myself as my own master. But when I wander from you, my life becomes a burden, and within me I find nothing but darkness and wretchedness, fear and anxiety. So I come back to you, and confess that I have sinned against you. And I know you will forgive me.

St Aelred of Rievaulx, c.1109-67



In this prayer Aelred admits his weakness. He is able to share it because he has an intimate relationship with the Lord. He states at the end that there is the assurance of forgiveness. This makes it much easier to be honest – with ourselves and with God. Repentance is about changing direction – going in a better direction – not about being miserable for failing. So, having been forgiven, Aelred can then put that behind him, and renew his relationship with the Lord.

Aelred was born in 1109 at Durham, and was sent to the Scottish court for an education as a noble and courtier. However, he found the royal court unsatisfying, and at the age of twenty-four he entered the Cistercian monastery at Rievaulx in Yorkshire. Bernard of Clairvaux encouraged him to write his first work, *The Mirror of Charity*, which deals with seeking to follow the example of Christ in all things. In 1147 he became abbot of Rievaulx, a post which he held until his death of kidney disease twenty years later at the age of 57. His most famous work is called *Spiritual Friendship*. He writes about spiritual friendship as a relationship that helps us grow in love: love of each other and love of God. In fact, for him friendship is a sacrament of God's love. In an earlier book he says that just as there is a continuous dialogue and interchange of love between the three persons of the Trinity, so human beings – the rational creatures made in the image and likeness of this Trinity of Persons – are called to relationships based on mutual dialogue, exchange, sharing and self-giving. This is the theological foundation for all spiritual relationships. In fact, through the experience of spiritual friendship we come to experience something of God's love. He refers to this friendship as a very holy sort of charity. He has been very influential through his writings, that are similar in approach to those of Bernard of Clairvaux, giving rise to his being called 'The Bernard of the North'. He died at Rievaulx on 12 January 1167, which has become his feast day.

Colin Lunt