



# Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

## Challenging Poverty

### 2: Learning from poverty and the poor

*Background Information*

#### **Detachment from material things: the nuns of West Malling**

The Benedictine nuns at West Malling Abbey in Kent believe that the shared life of an abbey or monastery *'should be prophetic to the society in which we live'*. One way it does so is in the way material things are viewed and shared.

Unlike Franciscans, Benedictine monks and nuns don't take a vow of poverty but live by a rule of no personal possessions with everything held in common. This radical attempt at communal living does not elevate being impoverished as if it were a virtue to be materially poor. Rather, the rejection of private ownership encourages a proper Christian detachment from material things in order to be properly attached to all things.

Benedictines would say that if you don't detach yourself from material things, you're putting up barriers between yourself and God, and yourself and other people. The nuns at West Malling see the sharing of goods as an indispensable feature of the common life; a life that is slowly building them up into the image of Christ.

They also believe that *'the lack of clutter somehow opens you to the things of beauty'*. The simplicity of the Benedictine life is reflected in its architecture, its music and its liturgy as well as its rule of life.

#### **Quote from Raam Dev who describes himself as a practical minimalist**

*'On an individual level, the abundance we accumulate – be it in the form of wealth, possessions, knowledge, and even skills – should only be accumulated to the point where we can provide for our families. Anything beyond that point should be given back to the community, to those who need it. Wealth of any type, just as love, must be shared to be fully realised.'*

#### **Quote from James Odgers in *Simplicity, Love and Justice***

*'As we look at our lives, do we know how we've ended up living how we're living and why? What choices have we made that control our present lifestyle? When we wanted that new house or car were we aware that the trade-off would mean working longer hours to pay for them and seeing less of the people we love? Too often we find ourselves on the treadmill of life, paying the consequences for choices we hardly knew we were making.'*

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### **For further reflection and action at home**

**Richard Foster makes the following ten suggestions to help us live more simply. Think about where you might begin to apply some of them.**

- 1** Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
- 2** Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you. Learn to distinguish between a real psychological need, like cheerful surroundings, and an addiction.
- 3** Develop a habit of giving things away. If you find that you are becoming attached to some possession, consider giving it to someone who needs it.
- 4** Refuse the propaganda of the custodians of modern gadgetry.
- 5** Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
- 6** Develop a deeper appreciation for Creation.
- 7** Look with a healthy scepticism at all 'buy now, pay later' schemes.
- 8** Obey Jesus's instructions about plain, honest speech (**Matthew 5:37**).
- 9** Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
- 10** Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

### **Take the following as a challenge.**

Find someone who's in a tough circumstance, who needs help, and spend time with them. Don't throw money at them. Learn about their culture, the culture of the poor. Inside the heart of the poor are lessons waiting to be taught. They're just waiting for someone to listen and to care.

### **To find out more**

***Celebration of Discipline and Freedom of Simplicity*** by Richard Foster

**Missions Manual** <http://missionsmanual.com/>

***Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on \$2 a Day*** (10 May 2009)  
by Daryl Collins, Jonathan Morduch, Stuart Rutherford and Orlanda Ruthven

***Simplicity, Love and Justice. A Discussion Course*** by James Odgers (2004)