

Gardens of the Heart



How is your Lent going?

Do you struggle? Are you happy with what you are doing?

One of the things I have always admired about London is its abundance of parks and gardens. Wherever I have lived or visited, there was always one of them within walking distance.

But gardens are not just somewhere outside of us to go to and visit. We all carry our own kind of gardens within us.

First there is the garden of separation and alienation from God and our fellow human beings when we do something wrong to them or to ourselves. This garden is full of cacti, thorn bushes and poisonous plants. It is certainly not one you want to visit for relaxation and to lift your mood. Instead, we would all like to avoid it. If we are there we would like to leave as soon as possible and hopefully not do too much damage to ourselves and others.

The next garden on our journey is the garden of resisted temptation. That is the one where we valiantly struggle against the things that try to take us away from the road of love, goodness and mercy. This is the garden where we recognise and accept our own proper size in the overall scheme of things: not too big and not too small. Here we don't fall prey to delusions of grandeur. But we don't shrivel to nothingness in the face of our fears either.

When we have achieved a level of self-knowledge there is another garden to visit. This is the garden of sharing good news. By actions and by words, or sometimes by giving money sacrificially. It is no less demanding than the other two. We try to make sure to spread the understanding of who is helping and guiding us in our lives. This is not easy because there are so many distractions which tell people that they don't need God. We often get disappointed.



That is where we enter the garden of suffering. It may just be a small patch. It may also be a very large park full of lakes from our tears. Only some very specialised plants grow on salty soil. Raising fruit and vegetable plants is probably a doomed project. But what they do do is hold the soil together that the wind and more floods of tears cannot blow away the ground of our foundation. So we are still stable and firmly anchored, and God is still our companion.

But then we have to move on to another level. We are not yet done visiting gardens. The garden of redemption is where suffering comes to a final head. Here the pain is excruciating. Nothing you have ever experienced can compare to this. We are utterly alone. We have to say goodbye to our loved ones. We say goodbye to love and life as

we know it. But then there is also the release. We won't hurt anymore, and our needs have shrunk to just taking one breath at a time. Then comes the point where we don't even need to breathe anymore.

In the last garden we finally come to rest. Here we are outside of everything that so far has made up our lives. We linger a bit longer and watch life from the outside. Then we move on. Many have imagined what lies beyond, but no one really knows.

One came back, and he never told anyone what the garden beyond is like.

Here the tour of our gardens must end for today. We wait with bated breath to find out what our next one might be.