**Chapter 4: The Tools for Good Works**

January 18, May 19, September 18

*First of all, “love Lord God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). Then the following: “You are not to kill, not to commit adultery; you are not to steal, nor to covet” (Rom. 13:9); “you are not to bear false witness” (Matt. 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20). “You must honour everyone” (1Pet. 2:17), and “never do to another what you do not want done to yourself” (Tob. 4:16; Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31).*

*Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23); discipline your body (1Cor. 9:27); “do not pamper yourself, but love fasting.” You must relieve the lot of the poor, “clothe the naked, visit the sick” (Matt 25:36), and bury the dead. Go to help the troubled and console the sorrowing.*

The first sentence of chapter four, from Jesus and the synoptic gospels, provides us with a teaching that is the guiding principle for all the tools to follow: love God and love others.

The human experience at the heart of Christianity testifies that if we are to love with all our heart, soul, and strength then we need God’s help. In seeking this help, we discover more and more deeply that true love and the divine life are somehow the same; so, as we practice love, we grow in God.

Loving others is to love God, loving God is to love others. Love is a circle with no beginning or end. Love of God, love of self, and love of neighbour become the same thing.

The rule’s tools are practical ways for love to grow and manifest. Anything done with love is a loving action. What we do with love becomes God’s action because it is being done with love.

These tools, when practiced together, *create* community. The mantra is another tool that creates community. It is an ‘inner tool’ that grace uses to draw awareness into the divine within. There we experience ourselves as essentially loving and communal. The ‘outer tools’ of the Rule, when practiced, grow in harmony with this inner. The inner and the outer of life grow together, becoming one dynamic of love.

If we covet another’s place in community, or something they have that we do not, what are we lacking? Could it be the self-assurance that grows from the regular practice of attending to Christ in the heart?

To discipline the body could mean anything from the practice of physical stillness during meditation to being active each day in the ordinary work of the community – all so that we might practice attending to something and someone other than ourselves. This is daily training in love.

Fasting might mean practicing life in a moderate way, away from the extremes of eating or drinking; of too much social media; of too much time alone or together; too much time in activity or avoiding what could practically be done. Over time, as we fast from these extremes, we come to see that the ‘middle way’ of the Rule is the soil from which grows compassion, mercy, acceptance, kindness, humility, and all the other ways of love. If we do not do practice enough with these tools the danger is that community will fade into a kind of house sharing: living together with little or no commitment to the welfare of each other.

In love there is no fear, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment, and one who fears has not come to perfection in love. Let us love because he loved us first. Anyone who says 'I love God' and hates a brother or sister, is a liar, since whoever does not love the brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have received from him, that whoever loves God also loves brother and sister. (1 John 4:18-21, RNJB)