

## Lenten Journey with Henri J.M. Nouwen – Reflection 3

### Introductory Bible passage:

God does not see as human beings see; they look at appearances but Yahweh looks at the heart. (1 Sam. 16: 7)

### From the writings of Henri J.M. Nouwen:

Our heart is at the centre of our being human. There are deepest thoughts, intuitions, emotions and decisions find their source. But it's also there that we are often most alienated from ourselves. We know little or nothing of our own heart. We keep our distance, as though we were afraid of it. What is most intimate is also what frightens us most. Where we are most ourselves, we are often strangers to ourselves. This is the painful part of our being human.

We fail to know our hidden centres; and so we live and die often without knowing who we really are. If we ask ourselves why we think, feel and act in such or such a way, we often have no answer, thus proving to be strangers in our own house. The mystery of the spiritual life is that Jesus desires to meet us in the seclusion of our own heart, to make his love known to us there, to free us from our fears and to make our own deepest self known to us. In the privacy of our heart, therefore, we can learn not only to know Jesus but, through Jesus, ourselves as well.

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Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ('turn stones into loaves'), to be spectacular ('throw yourself down'), and to be powerful ('I will give you all these kingdoms'). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity ('You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone'). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.

### Prayer:

Almighty God  
your eternal word is the true light  
that enlightens every human being.  
Heal the blindness of our hearts,  
that we may discern what is right  
and love you sincerely.

(Adapted from *Show me the Way – Readings for each day of Lent* by Henri J.M. Nouwen)