

When a Brother Dozes

An old man came to see one of the desert hermits and asked him this. "Tell us, when we see brothers dozing during the sacred office, should we pinch them so they'll stay awake?"

The wise one replied: "Actually, if I saw a brother sleeping, I would put his head on my knees and let him rest."

There is a dilemma. Do we live by the letter of the law, or by grace?

Whether we be public servant, health practitioner or ordinary citizen, others are quick to criticize, and they do that by holding up the letter of the law before us. Life is measured in terms of white and black, and the label is often attached for a long time. "Do you remember when he / she ..." is whispered with a certain aura of delight.

Then along comes someone who doesn't listen to the rumours and isn't so quick to quote the rules. That person can be a true peace-maker, and can quickly bring fresh understanding to the situation. These are the people who understand when a fellow-worshipper is tired, who stop to consider the broader picture of how it might be that this person acted in an unexpected way.

Isn't this the message that Jesus brought to a society that was locked into rules of obedience?

You have to give thought to the circumstance, he said. If an ox falls in the well on the Sabbath, you have to pull him out while he is yet alive. If people are hungry, they need to be fed.

Who are you to judge another? What do you know of the whole story? The way my Father teaches us to live is with grace and mercy.

Reach out to your brother. Give support to your sister. Welcome the stranger. There is no greater love than this!

(written by Joyce Sasse November '09)