A Reading from
*The Mirror of Charity*
by Aelred of Rievaulx

being the appointed reading for Friday after 4 before Advent

In heaven there is nothing except true and eternal love, an eternity spent in the delight of love and in the enjoyment of truth, in the beholding of the eternal, true and most loveable Trinity. In heaven alone is the rest and peace of happiness perfectly possessed. Why then do we rush around all over the place, driven by anxiety? Why are we so absorbed in trivia? Whatever we seek and wherever we seek it, ultimately it can be found in God alone. Excellence, knowledge, riches, delight—all are to be found in heaven, and only there, in their perfection.

Does this world’s pit of death and miry clay yield true excellence? Can there be perfect knowledge when we live under the shadow of death? What real delight can be found in this howling wilderness, this barren desert? There is no excellence in this world that is immune to fear, no knowledge in a person who does not know himself, no delight in earthly things that will not ultimately render us like a horse or mule. If your pleasure is in the pursuit of glory or riches, remember you can take nothing with you when death claims you, nor will your earthly glory have any power in the land of the dead. True excellence is to be found only where ambition can yearn for nothing higher, true knowledge only where nothing escapes its grasp, true delight only where nothing can ever vitiate the pleasure, true riches only where the possession of them can never be exhausted.

It was a sad day when we ran away from you, O Lord. Our exile drags on, and we yearn to know when we will come and see your face. O that we had the wings of a dove, so that we could fly away to you and in you find our rest! Meanwhile, Lord Jesus, I beg you to allow my soul to grow wings in the next of your teaching. May my soul embrace you who was crucified for me, and drink the life-giving draught of your precious blood. May the thought of you and your passion dominate my memory so that the fog of forgetfulness does not obscure you. Until I come before your face I will shun all knowledge except that of my crucified Lord, lest the untruth of error undermine the foundations of my faith. May all my love be directed to you, lest its energy be frittered away in useless desires.