



Reflection Letter 8, November 2015

CONTEMPLATION

OWITF Reflections

Contemplation is the final aspect of the 5Cs that we have stressed as the pillars to OWITF (Community, Consciousness, Celibacy, Compassion and Contemplation).

For many of us, our immediate reaction to most situations is one of judgement, defensiveness or attachment. But we can also be open, grateful and present during some moments of mindfulness. The Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr would call these mindful moments the 'second gaze'.

The ego or false self seems to have the first gaze at almost everything. The first gaze is more calculating than compassionate. The True Self often seems to be hidden behind the defensive needs of the false self. Rohr continues, "I can see why all spiritual traditions insist on daily prayer, otherwise I can assume that I am back in the cruise control of small and personal self-interest, the pitiable and fragile 'richard' self."

∞ ENOUGH ∞

*ENOUGH. THESE FEW WORDS
ARE ENOUGH.*

*IF NOT THESE WORDS, THIS
BREATH.*

*IF NOT THIS BREATH, THIS
SITTING HERE.*

*THIS OPENING TO THE LIFE
WE HAVE REFUSED
AGAIN AND AGAIN
UNTIL NOW.*

UNTIL NOW.

DAVID WHYTE

A premise of the spiritual journey is that personal transformation is possible and through spiritual practice we can explore that possibility. This spiritual practice is not referring to a spirituality that promises virtue through a combination of gritted teeth and a will of iron. Such virtue would be born of the ego and would be unlikely to last. No, the spiritual practice we are thinking of here is the practice of prayer and, more specifically, the practice of contemplative styles of prayer such as centering prayer.

Centering prayer is a non-conceptual and non-vocal prayer. It is a prayer of silence and a step towards openness to the gift of contemplation. The method is simple. You choose a sacred word of one or two syllables. You sit comfortably with your eyes closed and silently repeat the sacred word. As thoughts fade you allow the repetition of the sacred word to fade also and as thoughts demand attention, you gently strengthen the repetition of the word. At the end of the twenty minute session you add a few additional moments with your eyes closed in order to ease the transition back to an awareness of your surroundings.

Your intention is all important in coming to this prayer and it is good to remember that it is a prayer of receptivity rather than of concentration. All we have to do is to turn up and silently repeat the sacred word. We leave everything else aside, especially our expectations. There is no such thing as a good or bad session of centering prayer. The sacred word eloquently and repeatedly enshrines our intention to pray and that is all that is necessary.

Centering prayer can be used by the individual and by a group or community. It is effective either way, though the experience of the prayer has a slightly different feel to it depending on whether it is used alone or with others.

This can be seen in the effects of centering prayer. These effects are evident, not so much in the centering prayer session itself, the experience of which may actually change little over the years, but in our inner dispositions. We gradually begin to see life through our True Self or with 'the second gaze'. We will notice, for example, that our attitudes towards others begin to undergo subtle changes. We may discover a newfound patience with people. We may notice greater tolerance, an increase in compassion, or a greater capacity to forgive. We may find that we are less defensive, less likely to react in anger and that we are more open to listening because we take things less personally. In addition, we may experience the healing of old wounds, wounds which were proving an obstacle to open, spontaneous and mature relationship with others. It is brought about not by determination and conscious decision making but by being open to the mysterious workings of the divine in our inner depths.

Thomas Keating writes that: "Contemplative prayer is the world in which God can do anything. To move into that realm is the greatest adventure. It is to be open to the infinite and hence to infinite possibilities. Our private self-made worlds come to an end; a new world appears within and around us and the impossible becomes an everyday experience."

Our Way into the Future is certainly a great adventure. It is attempting a new reality within the Congregation. This reality is premised upon a profound experience of contemplation and justice. Strategic planning, sound strategies of community development and sustainability all have their part to play. Ultimately, however, it is the movement of the Spirit within us that will determine outcomes. It is our conviction that only those new communities, which manage to establish contemplative practice, will carry the hope of bearing the fruit of OWITF.

This reflection was written mostly by Denis Gleeson (European Province) who has just published a CD on Centering Prayer.

BUDDHA WAS ASKED, "WHAT HAVE YOU GAINED FROM MEDITATION?"

HE REPLIED, "NOTHING."

HOWEVER, BUDDHA SAID, "LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I LOST: ANGER, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, INSECURITY, FEAR OF OLD AGE AND DEATH."

