

## CONTEMPLATION

*Christian Contemplative Prayer* is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions, whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, thinking, feeling and choosing; even closer than consciousness itself. The root of all prayer is interior silence. Though we think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words, this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is a prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment.

For the Church's first sixteen centuries Contemplative Prayer was the *goal* of Christian spirituality. After the Reformation, this living tradition was virtually lost.

**Finding sanctuary in prayer - through the practise of contemplation, we can find a PORTABLE INTERNAL SANCTUARY. We can be lifted out of ourselves and away from the noises in our heads.**

Rule of Benedict, 20 "Reverence in Prayer"

'We must know that God regards our purity of heart and tears of compunction not our many words. Prayer should therefore be short and pure'

This is a relief! - this is a heartfelt attitude, a way of living - not technique.

The aim of the monastic life for Benedict was to keep the Memory of god kept alive in our hearts throughout the day and night.

The main way to be in silence creatively is through reading

Reading creatively

Conscious choice about how to read

'lectio Divina' or 'divine reading' or 'meditative reading'

Reading with the conviction that God is addressing 'you' through the text - this will lead to prayer and the reader then responding by addressing God as 'you' in return.

In 13<sup>th</sup> Century reading became a means of understanding and controlling life and no longer as a means of receiving wisdom. This was analytical approach that lead to reading for leisure, education, experience of art through poetry

- Gift to be received - NOT problem to be dissected

## METHOD

- 1) Lectio Divina is not just about learning something of God. It is also about letting the text question you in order to understand your hidden self.
- 2) Read Slowly! As we do not grasp the meaning fully first time round. We need to repeat and savour the taste – like chocolate or a fine wine!
- 3) Lectio is a way of prayer
- 4) Prayerful reading becomes prayerful living if phrase then carried with you throughout the day.

P65 Carthusian Monk Guigo

“He describes the four movements of the process as reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. MEDITATION: a deep entry into the meaning of the text; PRAYER: reader’s response to God in light of this meaning; CONTEMPLATION simple resting in the presence of God, without the need for further words.

He uses the image of eating to illustrate these different stages in ‘digesting’ a text: ‘Reading, as it were, puts the food into the mouth; meditation chews it and breaks it up; prayer extracts its flavour; contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes’.

This is compared to the action of consuming the bread and the wine in Eucharist as communion with Christ, so reading becomes communion and begins to transform life. Reading moves beyond information and becomes transformation.

Meditation moves us from the context of busyness to a new context where we are slowed down and we can see what is really happening.

Authenticity of times of meditation will be tested in daily living – patience, sensitivity....

Teresa of Avila

illustration of the stages of prayer – ‘the soul as a garden where the presence of God is the water that the garden needs to flourish...’

(These notes were taken from, and in response to, ‘Finding Sanctuary’, by Abbot Christopher Jamison)

## REFLECTIONS

I have seen that my need to hurry has infected how I read. I need to learn to slow down and let the words penetrate – to let the meaning of the words wash over me and sink through the noise and busyness in my head so that eventually it will find a home in my heart.

Contemplation is the result of prayer and meditation. It takes us to a place of openness where we can meet with God. It brings us to an open path, with an invitation for us to take steps into the mystery that is our spiritual journey.

What will your path look like? Where will it take you? What will you find?

## QUESTIONS

What were people's responses to the chapter or what I have just shared?

What are people's experiences of contemplation?

Who has tried it and been disappointed or given up?

Who has had positive experiences?

What puts us off trying? What are you afraid of?

What do you long for?

Do you have a desire or hope for your relationship with God?

What struck you the most in the chapter?

What has challenged you?

What desire has it awakened/ or frustrations? Failure that haunts?