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Contemplative Ways for Being
THE NOW AND THE QUEST

Michael Fish, OSB CAM.

PRAYING

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

– MARY OLIVER
THIRST

THAT LIVES IN US

If you put your hands on this oar with me,
they will never harm another, and they will come to find
they hold everything you want.

If you put your hands on this oar with me, they would no longer
lift anything to your
mouth that might wound your precious land –
that sacred earth that is your body.

If you put your soul against this oar with me,
the power that made the universe will enter your sinew
from a source not outside your limbs, but from a holy realm
that lives in us.

Exuberant is existence, time a husk.
When the moment cracks open, ecstasy leaps out and devours space;
love goes mad with the blessings, like my words give.

Why lay yourself on the torturer's rack of the past and future?
The mind that tries to shape tomorrow beyond its capacities
will find no rest.

Be kind to yourself, dear – to our innocent follies.
Forget any sounds or touch you knew that did not help you dance.
You will come to see that all evolves us.

If you put your heart against the earth with me, in serving
every creature, our Beloved will enter you from our sacred realm
and we will be, we will be
so happy.

THE BOOK OF MONASTIC LIFE
(EXCERPT)

Only in our doing can we grasp you.
Only with our hands can we illumine you.
The mind is but a visitor:
it thinks us out of our world.

Each mind fabricates itself.
We sense its limits, for we have made them.
And just when we would flee them, you
come and make of yourself an offering.

I don't want to think a place for you.
Speak to me from everywhere.
Your Gospel can be comprehended
without looking for its source.

When I go toward you
it is with my whole life.

– *RAINER MARIA RILKE*
RILKE'S BOOK OF HOURS: LOVE POEMS TO GOD



WELCOME MORNING

There is joy
in all:
in the hair I brush each morning,
in the Cannon towel, newly washed,
that I rub my body with each morning,
in the chapel of eggs I cook
each morning,
in the outcry from the kettle
that heats my coffee
each morning,
in the spoon and the chair
that cry “hello there, Anne”
each morning,
in the godhead of the table
that I set my silver, plate, cup upon
each morning.

All this is God,
right here in my pea-green house
each morning
and I mean,
though often forget,
to give thanks,
to faint down by the kitchen table
in a prayer of rejoicing
as the holy birds at the kitchen window
peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it,
let me paint a thank-you on my palm
for this God, this laughter of the morning,
lest it go unspoken.

The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard,
dies young.

— ANNE SEXTON
THE AWFUL ROWING
TOWARD GOD

THE NEW EARTH IS NO UTOPIA (EXCERPT)

In past ages, they would probably have been called contemplatives. There is no place for them, it seems, in our contemporary civilization. On the arising new earth, however, their role is just as vital as that of the creators, the doers, the reformers. Their function is to anchor the frequency of the new consciousness on this planet. I call them the frequency holders. They are here to generate consciousness through the activities of daily life, through their interactions with others as well as through “just being.”

In this way, they endow the seemingly insignificant with profound meaning. Their task is to bring spacious stillness into this world by being absolutely present in whatever they do. There is consciousness and therefore quality in what they do, even the simplest task. Their purpose is to do everything in a sacred manner. As each human being is an integral part of the collective human consciousness, they affect the world much more deeply than is visible on the surface of their lives.

– ECKHARD TOLLE
A NEW EARTH

Do not be depressed. Do not let your weakness make you impatient. Instead, let the serenity of your spirit shine through your face. Let the joy of your mind burst forth. Let words of thanks break from your lips.

– *ST. PETER DAMIAN*

WINDOWS OF WONDER (EXCERPT)

Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered but a journey inside ourselves to become one with what already is. When we do this and glimpse what is there, it takes our breath away.

One morning the mystic, monk and poet Thomas Merton realized, to his surprise, that contemplation is not about the acquisition of a consciousness emptied of everything except thoughts of God. It was the opposite – not a movement towards a distant God but a sinking into a deeper awareness of one's own life and to find God already there. Contemplation, he surmised, was not a different state to our usual way of being. There is only one reality. Our hours and our days are divided not between time spent with God or with the world but between those occasions when we are more, or less, aware of God's presence in our experiences – when we are more, or less, distracted from that presence by the heartaches of our work.

“It is enough, to be in an ordinary human mode, with one's hunger and sleep, one's cold and warmth, rising and going to bed, putting on blankets and then taking them off, making coffee and then drinking it,” he wrote. “Also defrosting the refrigerator, reading, meditating ... Contemplation is a way of being really inside our own daily experiences. We are in contemplation when we perform the routine tasks of our lives

so as to perceive in them that our lives are not little, anonymous or not important any more, but that what's timeless, eternal, is in the ordinariness of things.”

Eternity is not opposed to time. It is pure presence. That is when we experience timelessness. “Time is eternity living dangerously!” the Kerry mystic John Moriarty believed. For those of us who feel too inadequate, too sinful to believe that any true intimacy with a Lover-God is ever even remotely possible, these are words of hope. Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered, a discipline to be perfected. It is the journey of the spirit into what is already within.

Only a few days ago a friend sent me a Masai prayer: “May you see what you see through different eyes, hear what you hear with different ears. May you taste what you have never tasted before, and go further than yourself.” The story of God's inner being is written everywhere, strewn around us like pearls in a parking lot, like love letters in a tip, like treasure hidden in every field. All we ask for is the grace to notice and believe in this extravagance, to identify the grace place. This is the work of contemplation.

– DANIEL O'LEARY
WINDOWS OF WONDER:
A SPIRITUALITY OF SELF ESTEEM

Be

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