

December 15: Prayer

I. Starting points

- Prayer is highly personal and individual
- Prayer is not meant to “please” God.
- Formal prayers are meaningless without consciousness.

II. Prayer using images or concepts

- This kind of prayer utilizes our faculties for reason, imagination, feelings, and will. We use words, images, and feelings to communicate with the divine. In this sense God is mediated through our thoughts and feelings.

III. Prayer without images or concepts

- This kind of prayer lets go of reason, imagination, feelings, and will. It is a *naked* mode of prayer—being to being, or essence to essence, without filtering through thinking or feeling. Highly intuitive.

IV. Contemplation

- Rooted in the doctrine of the divine indwelling (Luke 17:21; John 7:38, 14:3; Romans 8:10-11; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Galatians 2:20).
- While God is transcendent, God is also immanent and chooses to dwell within us.
- Seeking unity of Divine and human in all circumstances and conditions of daily life: washing dishes, caring for children, family, work, sleeping.

V. Contemplative spirituality helps us realize God’s presence within us.

- Known only by love.
- It is not a mere respite from worldly concerns
- Contemplation revolutionizes conventional attitudes and roles in order to transform the foundation upon which life is lived.

VI. Bede Griffiths writes about contemplation:

It is not something that we achieve for ourselves. It is something that comes when we let go. We have to abandon everything—all words, thoughts, hopes, fears, all attachment to ourselves or to any earthly things, and let the divine mystery take possession of our lives. It feels like death, and it is, in fact, a sort of dying.

VII. Howard Thurman (1900–1981), a mystic, urged people to “listen for the sound of the genuine:”

*- There is something in every one of you that waits, listens for **the sound of the genuine** in yourself and if you cannot hear it, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching and if you hear it and then do not follow it, it was better that you had never been born.*

VIII. Conclusion

- Contemplation is an entirely different way of knowing reality that has the power to move us beyond mere ideology and dualistic thinking.
- Mature religion will always lead us to some form of prayer, meditation, or contemplation to balance out our usual calculating mind.
- Contemplation is work, so much so that most people give up after their first futile attempts. But the goal of contemplation is not success, only the continuing practice itself.
- The only people who pray well are those who keep praying! In fact, continued re-connecting is what I mean by prayer, not occasional consolations that we may experience.