

SEARCHING FOR A CONTEMPLATIVE WAY OF LIFE

By Sr. Brenda Walsh, Racine Dominican

In past decades, many perceived a contemplative way of life as reserved for clergy, nuns or other religious groups. In our time, people of all ages and conditions are seeking something more - hope, meaning and a deeper satisfaction in the core of their being. We live in a culture that emphasizes achievement, success, and productivity – a “more is better” approach. Development is seen mainly as material, physical, intellectual and emotional, with little emphasis on a grounding in the spiritual and moral aspects of life. People often rush and push to meet deadlines and overcrowded schedules, with little time for quiet or reflection.

All human beings are capable of experiencing and nurturing contemplation and the invitation is extended to all of us. It is a gift of God and not something we accomplish by our own power. It is an invitation to get in touch with the Divine in ourselves, in others, and in all of creation.

Psalm 46: 10 “Be still and know that I am God” is the foundation for contemplative living. God is to be found right in the moment and circumstance in which we find ourselves. The present moment is where we discover the Divine right in the midst of the ordinariness of our everyday lives, even in the midst of the messiness we sometimes experience. Rev. Daniel O’Leary, a priest in West Yorkshire, England, in the May 17th, 08 issue of *The Tablet*, wrote about contemplation in an article entitled: “Windows of Wonder.” (www.thetablet.co.uk) ” It is not a technique to be mastered, but a journey each of us can make to get in touch and become one with the Divine within. It is about the closeness of God to us. Contemplation is a way of being deep inside our daily experience.”

Thomas Merton, a well-known writer on the subject, reminds us “We are in contemplation when we perform our daily tasks so as to perceive in them that our lives are not little or insignificant but that what is timeless and eternal is in the ordinariness of little things.” Often we miss the beauty and wonder of the ordinary. Contemplation then, is not something we do. It is how we are present in each moment of our daily lives. Contemplation does not remove us from the pain and struggle of daily living. It helps us keep a proper perspective without resorting to blame, anger or despair in times of challenge.

Contemplation not only gets us in touch with the Divine within but also helps us to be in touch with what is false or deficient within ourselves that needs to be transformed – our anger, defenses, worry, fear, and the need to control. It will help us let go of the unnecessary baggage we carry around in our minds and hearts and submit them to the transforming and healing power of God. This will lead us to a sense of gratitude and wonder at the beauty within us, within others and in all of creation, and will lead us to a new way of seeing and being.

Prayer and meditation are a necessary preparation for getting in touch with the divine in ourselves, in the events and happenings in our own lives and in our relationship with others and the whole of creation. Be still, slow down, be present to who we are right now and let go of the concerns and all that holds us back from a full encounter with the Divine always available to us. In moments of prayer and contemplation and quiet reflection, we touch the inner core of our being and allow the source of our life and well-being to speak within us and lead us to action on behalf of justice in our world. We become more aware of our connectedness to the entire human family, not just to the people around us. We hope for and work for a world more like the one God has in mind for the global family. Contemplation and action are not two separate things that we do. They are but two sides of the same coin.

When we pause and ponder what our lives are about, we reach out in love and compassion to bring hope and healing to a broken and bleeding world. We discover God's transforming presence and power working through us in our world. We also discover that all of creation, all of life vibrates with the divine life and invites us to a daily journey of transformation. Fr. Donald Goergen, OP, a well known Dominican priest, reminds us that "The fruit of our contemplation is a diminished self-centeredness or self-pre-occupation. We become more centered, and we discover that our true center is beyond us, that we are not the center of the universe ourselves." We are led to a deeper self. Our personal transformation connects us to the world's transformation and allows us to engage the world more deeply from within a deeper Source.

"BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM YOUR GOD."