



Monastic Musings

Spring 2013

Welcome to Spring!

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall



Finally it is Spring! The winter weather around Massachusetts was really strange again this year to say the least. The weather patterns continue to change thus one cannot really say how each season will be. Change is the constant thought for us which actually is a good thing if we are willing to see it that way.

This month, Mother Myrella and I worked together on one article to present to you. We have learned over our lives that one thing is constant in how we interact with others and see ourselves. That one constant is THOUGHTS. We wanted to present this truth in a way that hopefully will enable you to understand just how important our thoughts are within the world. That is something we are not really taught either in school or church, but it is something that needs to be taught so that we may actually live a more peaceful and loving life within this world. If we learn how to control our thoughts, the world could really be a more wonderful place to live! Can you imagine a world without arguments, conflicts and maybe even wars? Our personal thoughts, along with group thinking, really affects everything around us. Jesus taught us to take a look at how we think but we missed that message!

Remember the story about Peter walking on the water?

“And Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come’. So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Matthew 14:28 – 31)



What happened when Peter did not keep his thoughts on what Jesus commanded him -- to walk on the water to him? Peter became fearful and was going to fall into the water! It was Peter's thoughts that got him into trouble at the moment.

It is time that we start hearing that message so that we can see our lives in a new and rewarding manner. Are you ready? Are you willing to try? What do you have to lose? Changing the way we think so that we can do anything we set our minds to - that is God's gift to all of us if we are willing to accept the gift.

“Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives”

By: Right Rev. Barb Martzall & Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

After reading several books and articles that related to how our thoughts influenced every aspect of our lives, we chose to address the subject. Why? Because every thought you think has been learned, and your perception of things is based upon what you have learned. Values evolve from what you have been taught. Transformation begins with understanding how “our thoughts determine our lives” as stated by Orthodox Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica, a 20th century disciple of the Optina Elders. He further states “...everything comes from our thoughts. Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture....If our thoughts are destructive, we will have no peace. If they are quiet, meek, and simple, our life will be the same...peace will radiate from us and influence all beings around us – rational beings, animals, and even plants.”

With Elder Thaddeus’ teaching in mind, do you find that this year is turning into a year much like last year – a year filled with a longing for something more? If you continue to feel unsettled and a lack of joy, that might be because you continue to think the same old thoughts, thereby continuing to have the same perceptions of life, the world, people, etc. So, nothing changes in your life. Why? Because we would prefer “to change others first and ourselves last”. Transformation begins with a willingness on each of our parts to be determined to see things differently. Only then, can we change our perceptions by not only changing our thoughts but by being vigilant over what thoughts we think. Behavior towards others will change based on what we choose to think.



Throughout all aspects of His life, Jesus has taught us what we need to do to evolve into the spiritual beings that God has called us to be – that is, to awaken to just who we are: the children of the Creator. Jesus’ birth is symbolic of hope, peace, and goodwill, which then becomes actualized through His life and ministry. Transformation occurs when we are willing to be spiritually and mentally reborn. Our minds must become like those of newborn babies – free and clear of all thoughts of judgment and perceptions of value. That requires steadfast willingness and effort on our parts as well as spending time in prayer, listening to what God’s Voice tells you. Do not judge what He tells you; simply listen to the message of Love that He writes upon your mind and heart. Then, nurture those thoughts of love until you can put them into action. Know that this is not something that will happen overnight. It will be a struggle to guard one’s thoughts as well as to even listen to what God is telling you.

Following are some examples of just how our thoughts can/do affect us and what we can do to change our thoughts:

Example #1:

Last evening I checked my work email account to see what “work” was in it so that I could “plan” for how I wanted to do things today. Let’s be honest, when we do this, we set ourselves up into a thought process that usually is not very positive and may even cause some loss of sleep! It usually goes something like this after you have awoken and even before your feet have hit the floor:

“Boy do I have a lot of reports that I must review (and many times the guys do not check their spelling or write clearly) and correct. Then I have to pull the pro forma invoice (temporary invoice) to check to be sure the guys input their billable information correctly, make all of the necessary corrections, and pull the final invoice. I can only hope that the server stays up but know that most likely the invoice will be stuck in queue! Finally, I have to consolidate the report with all of

the exhibits and email the report and invoice to the client.” (I hope that they have provided me with the correct email ID....)

Take a look at some of the negative thinking in this thought process! What type of day am I going to have because of this thinking? Basically it is going to be a “bad day” since I will be edgy, on guard for issues, and act negatively to those around me. My thoughts of what I see (whether perceived or real) will always affect how I function for the day.

It would have been better to have these thoughts as I awoke and got out of bed:

“Thank you God for this wonderful day. Please be with me every moment of this day that you have given me. (Then you are free to allow yourself to think about what you will be doing at work.) Boy, the guys sure did a lot of reports. Let me do them in the order received. I will do as much as it is humanly possible to do to get the work accomplished today without losing my “cool” over any of the problems I encounter. If I feel stressed, I will stop and ask for your help, ‘remembering to thank you for always being there to hear my call to you’.”

Now if you look at this response, you will see that you are much more positive and thus will accomplish so much more with love in your thoughts and actions! And before you did anything, you thanked God and asked Him to join you for the day! Now that is the way to start the day – in Peace and Love.

Example #2:

You wake up Sunday morning and you are fighting with yourself about whether or not to go to Church since you have other things you would rather do today.

You might be thinking:

“I know I should go to church since it means that I will hopefully be spiritually fed. I will also be able to see so and so at church so that we can make plans to do something together. But really, I need to get this done or that done so that I will be ready for the week. Can I spare the hour or two at church?”

Do you see all of the negative thoughts you have put out there? I surely hope so! Recognizing that you are thinking negative thoughts is the first step in overcoming that kind of thinking.

Maybe this is a better way of thinking over the situation:

“Thank you God for this wonderful day. Please be with me as I go about this day. I think I will go to church to start my day with you. And then from there, I can do whatever I need to get done so that I will be ready for the week.”

That is more positive and you have set yourself up to be able to basically accomplish everything that you need to do after you have made time to worship with God in Church.

Example #3:

You find that you have some negative thoughts about certain people because of their politics, gender, sexual orientation, body size, nationality, skin color, religious beliefs, for any perceived differences from your set of beliefs. You have learned/been taught to hate and discriminate so your mind automatically labels these sons and daughters of our Creator as unworthy creatures based on some label you have applied. We’ve all done that based on our prejudices, and yet Christ demonstrated to us through the people He chose to spend time with that ALL are worthy

of God's love, forgiveness, and mercy – even those in our society who we find most abhorrent. To see all of creation as God sees creation requires effort on our parts. So let's begin by training our minds (and hearts) to set aside judgments in the small things:

For example, you see a person who has piercings and tattoos. What is your first thought? Is it possibly revulsion or fear? Has your mind already judged this person as bad or odd? That person could be the most loving and kindest soul you have ever encountered, but you will never know because you cannot get past your prejudices. Do you see how quickly we leap to judgment based on what we see or what we've learned? It takes but an instant to condemn. So, let's focus on practicing instants of holiness rather than instants of condemnation. Just for this moment, I will judge no one. Rather, I will let all people be as they are today and see each person as God sees His creation: as His own beloved child.

“Father, be with me every moment of the day and help me to see each of your creations with your eyes and let my thoughts be only of you and your love.”

The examples above are just some of the ways of transforming our thinking. It's a constant and ongoing challenge to “be still an instant” and allow our minds to be open to God's voice within us. It does not matter what our religious beliefs are, God speaks to and through all of us. We simply need to listen and live in the present moment – that which is right now with no previous perceptions.

Perhaps some of the thoughts below will help us in this challenge to change our thinking. At the very least, they are a starting point for reflection:

“Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behaviors. Keep your behaviors positive because your behaviors become your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.” (Ghandi)

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37 (New King James Version)

“You may believe that you are responsible for what you do, but not for what you think. The truth is that you are responsible for what you think, because it is only at this level that you can exercise choice. What you do comes from what you think.” (ACIM)

“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.” (Buddha)

“We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.” (The Talmud)

“Never limit your view of life by any past experience.” (Ernest Holmes)

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.” (Mother Teresa)

“Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we have learned here. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and the acceptance of love back into our hearts.” (Marianne Williamson)

Blessings to you as you begin the journey of changing your thoughts by seeing with Christ's eyes.....

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