



# Monastic Musings

## *Living in and Practicing the Presence of God*

Spring 2015

**Spring is here!**

*by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*



I am so very glad that winter is finally over! It was a rough one for almost everyone within the United States! Between the cold temperatures and the precipitation type that occurred, it was a miserable winter. Now I am looking forward to the blooming of the flowers and the trees. To see the rebirth of everything around us here at the hermitage! I hope all our little critters made it through the snow storms. I have seen a squirrel or two playing in the snow trying to find their nuts they buried, but it was a deep dig they had to do to find anything given we had 3 – 5 feet of snow in some areas where they usually burry their nuts. Mother Myrella saw the

male cardinal in late February so that was wonderful. It is taking a long time to get the snow melted this year given that we never had the mid-winter warm up we usually get. But it will all melt and mother nature will shine brightly!

Snow finally was gone the weekend after Easter. Now it is like summer in May, but it is wonderful to see everything blooming and the little critters running around.

Spring gives us another chance to “clean house” with our spiritual life. If something in your prayer and/or spiritual life is not working, then it is time to make a change. We should be able to bask in the presence of God no matter where we are and not matter what we are doing. Every moment of our life, whether we want to admit to it or not, is another moment to experience God’s presence. We love to compartmentalize our daily lives and in the process we push God aside to only turn to Him only when we “need” something! So sad. God wants to be a part of our entire life and not only when we want Him there. Let me leave you with this one thought, Is God part of your entire life – home, work, play? I close this section with this prayer:

*Help me to be aware dear Lord –  
aware that I am Yours,  
that I am never alone.  
Your Presence is closer than the air I breathe.  
Help me to practice and celebrate  
Your Presence daily for it is a loving Presence,  
a strengthening Presence,  
a healing Presence*

*and a forgiving Presence. Amen*  
*(Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris)*

---

## ***Easter 2015***

*By Rev. Myrella LeClair*

When I think of Easter, I think of the rebirth of life-forms in general rising from hibernation and the seeming despair of winter into the life-giving Spring. Between the frequency of snowstorms and the amount of snow received as well as the severe winds and resulting below zero temperatures, winter in New England was extremely brutal this year. Finally, it appears as if winter is loosening its stranglehold on us. We have been blessed with bright sunshine for a few days and warmer temperatures, but there are still occasional snow showers. However, as with all cycles – prolonged or otherwise – this winter will end.

I must admit, however, that this winter has profoundly affected my psyche and spirituality to the point that I feel is as if I am going through a prolonged period of God's absence in my life. While my spirit knows that is impossible for me to be disconnected from my Creator, my mind perceives the misery that I am feeling as God being absent. It is almost as if it is Holy Saturday: Christ has died and is currently in the tomb. In reality, it is my perception of the weather-induced misery and the resulting depression that has allowed me to be absent from God's presence.

Why has that happened? Because instead of standing before God with an open mind and a listening heart and saying "Here I Am, Lord", I "chose" to rest in my perceived misery rather than rest in God's presence. Is it any wonder that I could not see through the darkness? Simply put, I've focused on me rather than on God – and on Christ's crucifixion rather than His Resurrection – forgetting that the Light will dispel the darkness. Light and Peace are God's will for us, and if we truly believe that, then we need to act accordingly. We can only see the Light – and be at Peace -- if we are not blinded by our lack of love, mercy, and peace toward others. There are no grey skies here – no uncertainties, no application of God's love to only those of certain religious or non-religious beliefs, no lack of charity or forgiveness. God loves all of his creations. Religion or lack of religion is not important to the One who only loves all of His creations and who created us to be like Him! Therefore, we must serve **all** with Love and not judge since God has judged us all worthy of His Love.

God being Love can only create love, and there are no degrees in that love – no one aspect of creation is loved more than another. God does not force His will on His creations. In my case, I chose to be absent from God and focus on my own perceived misery rather than focus on being in God's presence and in His Light. I also cherished the grievances that I held against others rather than offering forgiveness to them – as Christ had taught us to do.

Unfortunately, we all make spirit-crushing choices at times, and it is up to each one of us not to stay mired in the consequences of those incorrect choices but to turn to our Creator who loves us unconditionally and say Here I am, Lord. Let your will be done in and through me. Let me truly listen to what God is saying to me through the Holy Spirit, knowing that it will always be a message of Love and being Loving, of Peace and being peaceful.



This Easter, my hope is that you also will also choose to focus on God and to be in His presence. Christ has shown us the way out of the tomb. Remember what Easter truly means: “Christ is risen” and we are risen with Him. That is, it is our resurrection as well; so, let us step into God’s presence and place our faith and trust in the love of God.

Peace and Joy to you as we stand together in God’s presence and “step back and let Him lead the way”.

---

## God Who Heals

by: Fr. Ron Lahti

I subscribe to an email column which comes out twice weekly from the Breslov Research Institute called A Sacred Time. In a recent edition by Rabbi Yehudis Golshevsky (Iyar2, 2015; Breslov Research Institute, Lakewood, NJ) the meaning of one of the Names of God is considered. As most know, in the Hebrew Scriptures, God revealed several Names he holds – usually elucidating one of God’s traits or actions. One of these Names in “*Ani Hashem Rofecha*”



(*Hashem* stands in for the four letter Name of God given to Moses considered too holy to be simply written or spoken) which is usually translated as “I AM God Your Healer”(Exodus 15:26, etc). Rabbi Golshevsky points out that the Hebrew word for healing – “*refuah*” – is rooted in the concept of “*rafah*” which means “softening”. Thus, Rabbi Golshevsky concludes the Name “*Ani Hashem Rofecha*” could actually be translated as “I am God Who Tenderizes You”.

Of course I chuckled at Rabbi Golshevsky’s wit, but it also spurred a deeper contemplation. In the saga of the Exodus, numerous times God refers to the Hebrews pejoratively as “you stiff-necked people” (Ex. 32:9, quoted again in Acts 7:51). Here God ties the rebelliousness of the people to the numerous obstacles and hazards they encountered on the way to the Promised Land. In several places, a position of not being open to God’s Word is referred to as having a “hardened heart” (Ex.9:12, Mark 6:52). The ideas of being hard, stiff are tied directly to a refusal to be open to God and God’s Word in that moment. And God’s Name – *Ani Hashem Rofecha* – implies that stiffness, hardened-ness is equivalent to being dis-eased, not in a state of wholeness.

But, *Baruch Hashem* – Blessed Be God, God also promises “but I will remove your hearts of stone and give you instead a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). God promises that to those who seek it, God will soften them and open them to be receptive to God’s Word and God’s Life. I ask myself – “Where have I become hardened? How am I being too stiff-necked to bend my will to God’s greater Will and plan? Why do I prefer to remain in a state of dis-ease just to prove a point or defend my viewpoint/will?” I can claim for myself God’s wondrous Name – *Ani Hashem Rofecha* – and make it my prayer – “Oh God You are the One Who softens my heart hardened by bitterness and selfishness. You can temper the stiff-necked-ness of my ego and pride. Oh God, You make me to be open and receptive to Your Word and Life. *Baruch atah Hashem Rofecha!* Blessed are You Oh God Who Tenderizes me!”

---

## *Religion vs Faith*

*by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

Over past couple of months my mind has been mulling over what has been reported in the news concerning religion, states, businesses, and individuals. I am seeing lots of issues that are occurring that really make me feel sad and even uncomfortable.

Part of what is happening is people have confused religion with faith. In the process, everyone is pushing their religious agenda on everyone else around them. No I am not going to get into the politics of what is happening since that is not what is needed at this point. What is needed is that we all must understand that faith and religion are not the same thing! Religion is the “container” that holds a group’s teachings concerning the way they see/practice their faith. Religion is thus the church/temple/synagogue that one attends. Faith on the other hand is our personal concept of a Supreme Being. It is that concept of a Supreme Being that leads to the building of the “container” that becomes our religion. Notice, I did not say God and that was intentional. I don’t want to get caught up in the argument over the name(s) that each religion calls the Supreme Being so I am electing to use a more generic name.

But what the true problem as I see it, is that we all want to determine exactly how we build that religious container and what the principles will be within that container. If someone else does not meet those principles, then they must be wrong when it comes to their faith and thus their religion and thus their church are wrong. Well, you know what, we all have a personal faith that has been formed over many years by our families, friends, acquaintances who lead us to or away from a religion and/or church. But is our faith the only faith in this world? The honest answer to this question is: NO. There are hundreds of faiths in this world and all are really just as important. They all lead to the same thing – eternal life with the Supreme Being -- just as there are hundreds of religions and churches in this world and they are trying to lead their members to the eternal life with the Supreme Being.

No religion or church or faith is the one true way in this world. Yes, I know, that probably just angered you, but really think about it for a moment without getting all caught up in what you have learned in your church. Look around you for a moment and see the many different cultures that make up the small part of the universe you are now standing in. Just as there are many different hair colors, eye colors, body builds, etc, of the people you see around you, there are many different faiths and thus many different religion and churches around you. What right do each of us have to say ours is more important than yours? We actually have no right and we as human beings need to learn to be more understanding of others and their faiths. Let’s be honest, is it not our religious teachings that actually create problems within our families, our communities, our states, even our country? The answer to that is a resounding YES!

Over the past year, how many laws have been passed here in the US that denote a “pushing” of religious ideas. In the process we are pushing our religious ideas of those who do not believe the same as we do. Let’s look at one faith for a moment: Christianity. Jesus is considered the founder of the Christian faith, but if you look at the Christian faith you will see it often does not reflect what Jesus taught. What Jesus was teaching was the old ways (the Old Testament teachings were closed and not the law any longer) and that He was bringing forth a new Law to live by (the New Testament). He taught his followers that everyone was equal and deserved respect and love. Okay, given this summary, what happened to the Christian churches as they developed? Well, basically each church decided what part of the message that Jesus taught that they would follow as faith for their church. The Christian churches today really do not look like anything that Jesus was proposing through his teachings. What happened? Well, human

beings happened, and they have decided what part of the message they want to follow or not follow. In the process, we have become very confused as to what Christianity truly is. Sad, so sad. Now we have one religion fighting another religion. One church fighting another church. And we wonder why people are so confused as to what to believe and how to act. Unfortunately religion often can lead to wars, and that is NOT what our Supreme Being wants.

What we as human beings need to do is that each of us needs to realize what our personal faith is and live that faith. We need to stop “pushing” our religion and start living our faith through our lives in a manner that shows and teaches love and respect to everyone we come into contact with! That is what our Supreme Being would want us to do. Not push away someone just because their religion is not like ours or their faith is not like ours. In our Supreme Being’s “church” there are many different faiths and thus many different churches. If our Supreme Being can “deal with this”, then why can’t we as human beings do so. We need to learn to live with one another in peace and love and not worry about what someone’s religion is. Every human being on this earth is made in the image of the Supreme Being! We as humans decide what we are going to do with that image – polish it or tarnish it. It is our choice freely given us. But because I may not believe as you do does not mean that I am wrong. It only means that we interpret what we believe differently. We need to learn to accept the differences and build a stronger world on the differences.

It is Spring time – a time of new birth or rebirth. Let us take the time to reach out to others who believe a little different from us and learn that they are really just like us in so many ways! We are all the Supreme Being’s Children and we need to live that way. Let us find a way to stop pitting one’s religion against another’s religion. Let us work together for the betterment of this world.

---

**Newsletter is copyrighted © by:**

**Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community**

**All writings are the views of the author(s) on a particular subject  
and are meant to challenge your thinking so as to help you grow in  
your spiritual walk with God.**

**Contact: [archimandritebarb@ohioocc.org](mailto:archimandritebarb@ohioocc.org)**