



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Spring 2017

What are we doing?

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

Well, it looks like Spring has finally arrived. But not without Old Man Winter trying his best to be nasty. Here in the Northeast, we had two surprising snow storms. The rest of the country had to deal with nasty weather also. And people want to deny climate change!

Really, it is time to remember that we are here on this earth to take care of it and all that makes up this earth, whether it is human beings, animals, land, water, or the environment. Instead we only seek to do what brings us comfort and money! We have become a world that does not care about the next generation but only about ourselves. I look around me and I wonder what has happened to our caring nature that we once had. We would see someone in pain, either physical or psychological and do whatever we could to help remove that pain. But today, I see people just turn their backs on the people around them unless those people can provide them some sort of "reward". I see people who really don't have an understanding of things who are easily led down the wrong path because of their lack of understanding. I see people now want to be a part of something bigger than them but don't even know how to go about it so that it is a positive situation. Instead, we have allowed ourselves to become like puppets and let others lead us in whatever direction they want. We are afraid to stand up for ourselves and make decisions that can make a big difference in our lives. We have abdicated our thinking to be controlled by the "majority" and thus find ourselves in a worse condition than when we started. So sad actually.



Is it not time for each of us to think for ourselves? God gave each and every one of us a brain to think with. Yes, we want to be a part of something, but we need to take a look at that something and be sure it fits what we personally think is right. America was built strong by each individual being willing to put forth an effort to make things better for each generation. We all come from immigrant backgrounds at some point in our generations of family. And each of our families came to this country for a different reason! But over time, each of the different nationalities learned to work together if they wanted the community they lived in to be better than what they came from. Sure, there were issues at first, but over time, those issues were worked out and the community worked together to the betterment of everyone! Today, that is not the case. Today,

we want to push our religious ideals, political ideals, and even our personal ideals down other's throats not caring what the results might be. "We want what we want and we shall have it no matter what the cost", has become the new battle cry. "The heck with what someone else might need or want as that is their problem and not mine."

Honestly, that was not the way I was raised! I was taught that family was important -- that how I treated others around me was the means by which I would be judged when it came time for me to leave this world. Families gathered together to celebrate together and share together so that all would have what was needed to live within this world. There was none of this idea that this is mine and you cannot have it. It was always, what can I do to help you.

When I sit back and look at things, I see people professing that they are Christian but really not following what Jesus taught. Instead they are pushing their own style of Christianity that is founded on the teaching of the Old Testament. They are not even teaching that which Jesus taught which was LOVE. What has happened over the last 30 years? Where did people learn to be so hateful of others? This hate even reaches into the family units today. Today religion is being used as a weapon to hurt others. Religion is really supposed to be a tool to understanding and love. Just because someone does not believe as you do does not make them wrong or even your enemy! You can find a way to join together to the betterment of both of you. There is only one God but He is called by many names. It is time we understand that we ALL are God's children and treat those around us as Children of God. It is time to stop all this fighting one another and join together to make life better for everyone!

Jesus did not teach us to limit our love but to give it freely to all those around us. Jesus never questioned someone's background before ministering to them. He freely gave to all those around him. Today we have become a society that decides everything based on religious ideals. That is not right as you are excluding those who may really have a great idea or a solution to a problem. Time for us to find a way to join together and work together for the betterment of everyone and for this world!

May we learn again how to live in Love and Peace.

Easter – A Time for Hope

by: Rev. Myrella LeClair

As I write this, it is Palm Sunday. The sun is gracing us with its warmth and light. I can only hope that its brilliance will serve to remind us to wash away the darkness that hovers over us – not the darkness caused by meteorological events but by the hatred and violence that



surrounds us. Yet, I know that despite this pervasive darkness, there is hope because that is what Jesus' resurrection was meant to teach us. Too often we focus on Jesus' horrible death as well as his descent into the tomb and not on his resurrection and its message of love and hope.

I believe that beyond this temporal world, there is the "real" world – an eternally peaceful and

love-filled “world” in which we abide with Jesus, one another, and all creation, as we rest together in our Creator’s Light and Love. There is only unity and the ancient recognition that we are truly one. We are all equally loved. I hope and pray that an epiphany occurs for all of us: our collective remembrance of who and what we truly are in relation to Jesus and our Creator as well as to one another – regardless of one’s religious or non-religious beliefs. However, before that collective remembrance can occur, each one of us must take off our blinders of hatred, superiority and unforgiveness. As difficult as it is for our ego-minds to acknowledge, we need to learn to see one another as our Creator sees us – with unconditional love.

Certainly, that is no easy task. So, we take it one step at a time. That first step is to search our minds and hearts for whatever or whomever we hate and then we give up that hatred to our Creator – just as Jesus did when he commended his tormentors to God. We do not return hatred with hatred or oppression with oppression because doing so only destroys our spirits and serves to create and escalate more hatred, thereby engendering more violence, perpetuating the cycle.

When we celebrate Easter this year, let us remember that Jesus’ resurrection teaches us about the power of love and hope and that Light, Peace and Joy are His will for us. And so we pray....
Jesus, let me see your face in all the faces I encounter and let me remember that your Light, Joy and Peace abide in all of us regardless of our differences. Let me become a beacon of light in this darkness and offer love, mercy and peace toward others. Amen.

Christ is risen; He is risen, indeed! We are risen with Him. Alleluia!

Spiritual Buffet-ism II ***by: Fr. Ron Lahti***

In the previous article, I pointed out a common experience among many spiritually oriented people – spiritual buffetism. I defined this as engaging in multiple, varied spiritual traditions and practices based on one’s immediate feelings/inclinations. I used the metaphor of a buffet because, like the food on the buffet, spiritual practices and traditions in themselves are good; it’s the misuse of them that can cause problems. The problems arise when adoption of a spiritual practice or tradition for a short time doesn’t produce immediate results, or the results which one desires or expects. One then jumps to the next tradition or practice which appears to hold the promised result. I also mentioned I have experienced this myself.

As I reflected on this subject, I found myself remembering visits to my grandmother’s house. My grandmother Jalonen was a tremendous cook and baker – the stereotypical image of an old world grandmother: rotund, in a plain print dress and apron with a “babushka” on her head and a great warm smile on her round face. She would signal me to follow her to her kitchen where I would find a wondrous array of breads and rolls and pies. All of them offered from her with love. I see how these treasures were not gifted to me to make me fat, or diabetic, or as a distraction from my everyday responsibilities. The gifts were expressions of my grandmother’s love for me. Of course, even though they were gifts of love, if I ate too much I got a stomach ache.



But even then, Grandma wouldn't scold me, or cast me out of her house – no, she would comfort me and offer an Alka-Seltzer to help alleviate my discomfort. My grandma realized my overeating wasn't due to gluttony but was really about me trying to take in as much of her love as I could – perhaps too quickly-and thus I was overwhelmed.

Christian writers starting with St. Paul usually upheld a view that spiritual exploration and experimentation was always at least suspect if not completely demonic. In his letters Paul wrote about “not being tossed about” by differing doctrines (Ephesians 4:14), and he specifically mentioned people following their own desires, because they have “itching ears”, and collecting a variety of teachers and thus being led to believing “in fables” (1 Timothy 4: 3-5). The fathers and mothers of the church often referred to this phenomenon as “prelest”, by which they meant a type of spiritual pride. Prelest is when one decides he/she knows best, calls the shots, and, spurning the counsel or advice of a staretz or spiritual father, charges forward in the spiritual life. The writers put forward that, since the person is not willing to seek counsel from those older and wiser in the faith, the door is open to deception by his/her own ego or the “powers of darkness”. In the teachings of the fathers and mothers, prelest is a grave danger for the soul, and a sign of great deception and delusion.

In light of insights from interspirituality thinkers, and as reflected in my experiences with my grandmother, I have come to see that spiritual exploration can be seen as a natural part of the spiritual life because all of the various spiritual traditions and practices are really expressions of God's love for us. When seen as expressions of love from God, we can turn to those practices or traditions that resonate with our yearnings of love for God. And, because we are human, our yearnings and attentions change with time. So, also though, we must use wisdom in engaging in spiritual traditions/practices so we can gain their benefits without developing obsessions or fanaticism about them. Further, we have to respect the cultures which produced the traditions so we do not appropriate what we do not understand or know how to use simply out of curiosity or novelty. In the next article I will explore my thoughts on how to safely and respectfully engage in spiritual exploration.

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