



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Summer 2014

Greetings

by Right Reverend Barbara

Welcome to the new focus of our Community's newsletter! The Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community has been undergoing a revitalization and re-focus of their ministry. We will be bringing to you snippets of thoughts from different sources that our Community members are reading and from the different spiritualities they are exploring. Hopefully these snippets/articles will resonate with you in a way that will help you grow spiritually.



Refocusing

by Right Reverend Barbara Martzall



Over the past few months, our Community has been taking a long look at their foundation as a Community and their ministry. Given in the past that the Community was made up of one hermitage with two monastics, not much was really needed concerning a formal Monastic Rule of Life and Rhythm of Monastic Life. But as we are now growing, it became imperative that we develop a more formal Monastic Rule of Life and Rhythm of Monastic Life (often called the Daily Rule). We needed something that tied all the monastics together on our monastic pathway.

Since we had built our Community around the Eastern Orthodox model of monasticism, we felt the need to continue basically in that framework. This meant that we wanted to develop a simple Monastic Rule of Life that would reflect the simplicity in life and also a Rhythm of Monastic Life that would be fluid given that all monastics are required to support themselves physically and financially. Each of us looked at different models of monasticism that are present in today's world, concentrating on those Communities that were built as Communities without walls since our Community is a Community without walls. We also did not want to build rules that would become cumbersome to follow and thus cause the monastic(s) a feeling of not being able to support themselves and still be monastic. We think that we have come to a balance at this point. Our Monastic Rule of Life is: *Openness and Accessibility to God and His Creations*. From this we developed a

Community Motto of: *Living in and Practicing the Presence of God.* Our Rhythm of Monastic Life is composed of: *Life based on prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, reading the Ancient Fathers, reading other spiritual writings, exploring one's relationship with God, exploring different spiritualities within the world, living within the world and continuously spreading the Gospel.*

As you can see the Rhythm of Monastic Life is really fluid in allowing the monastic the capability of developing a personal rhythm of daily life that fits their physical, financial and spiritual needs. It allows for one to explore many different areas of spirituality. As a Community, we decided at this time to use the daily prayers and reading as formulated by the Northumbria Community. The daily prayers and readings will thus tie the monastics of the Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community together in unity. One of our future projects, and yes I do mean future, is developing our own Daily Prayer Book and meditations.

Our Community is constantly exploring and evolving as it grows and sees needs that may not be met at the time. We welcome the chance to move in directions that are needed by the monastics of the Community and also the people that they serve. The future is open and very fluid for us. We don't fear changes, but actually welcome them! As a Community, we are willing the challenge the accepted norms in order that we can spread God's Gospel of Love as Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount.

Living in God & Practicing the Presence of God

By Rev. Myrella LeClair

You may have heard those phrases used in the title many times but may not understand what they mean. For the Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community, we understand those phrases to mean being open and attentive to God (living in the Presence) as well as to His creations (practicing the Presence). For us, being open to God means that we enter into His presence, standing before Him with open minds, uplifted hearts, and empty hands, ready to receive our Father's Love, Christ's guidance, and the Holy Spirit's wisdom. No matter what we may be physically doing, we attempt to remain spiritually attuned to and in constant communications with God (in all Persons). The operative word is "attempt" because all it takes is one moment of letting the ego rule, and we are



no longer living in or practicing the Presence. It takes constant vigilance to stay focused on God and then to quickly regain our focus when we fail. Failure teaches us humility and provides us the opportunity to reverse course to accept God's love and to share His Love and Peace with all whom we encounter.

We cannot expect to pray for five minutes or so a day and spend 15 minutes of the day in

meditation or spiritual reading and think that we are living in God's presence. One must choose to abide in God every moment of the day. We start this day with prayer and then keep God in our consciousness by thanking God throughout the day and asking for His guidance throughout the day. Try thanking God at least once every waking hour. Remember that God abides in you. It is especially important to call upon God when the day is not going well so that you can listen to His guidance.

If one wants to live in the presence of God, one must also set aside time for solitude – time alone with God spent in quiet reflection, prayer, spiritual reading – or just “being” in His presence “without any special purpose or reason except the desire to be with God”. When we have established this state within ourselves, then we can practice the presence of God by extending Love and Peace to all. For us as Christians, that means being Christ-centered – not just during times of prayer and worship but at all times. How do we do that? By practicing love, mercy, and forgiveness as Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount and through practicing His command to love one another – to keep in mind that each of God's creation has God at its very core. Do you see the Christ? Do you let your ego judge or do you quickly ask Christ for guidance? Those ego moments will lessen when you continue to gently turn your mind back to Christ and remember to ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Our God is a loving God who loves us at all moments. For us to live in the presence of God, we need to live in the present – one moment at a time since every moment offers us the opportunity to act in the manner that Christ taught us. It may help to keep the following thought in your mind and heart:

“Yesterday is gone forever; tomorrow will never come; there is only today; and today is the fulfilling of the law. This moment I acknowledge the Christ as my being; I acknowledge the Christ as the life of my friend or enemy; I acknowledge the Christ alone.” (Joel S. Goldsmith, The Infinite Way)

Again, please do not let your failures to live in the Presence discourage you or make you feel guilty. As soon as you realize what has happened, just do what Christian Mystic Joel Goldsmith advises and “acknowledge the Christ alone” in all whom you encounter. Take time to reflect on what that means for you and your relationship with all living things.

Many Possessions

by: Fr. Ron Lahti

Now as Jesus was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him and asked Him “ Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is God. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother”. And he answered and he said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth”. The Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him “One thing you lack:

*Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”
But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22 NKJV)*

While I was on my commute home a week ago, I was trying to find something to listen to on the radio. I stumbled on a talk by R.C. Sproul, a protestant minister on the above passage. Most of us are aware that most commentaries/preachers cite this story as Jesus’ call for the disciple to be willing to surrender their whole lives to God, and not to trust “works”. The “rich young ruler” (as he is identified in Luke’s account of the story, 18:18ff.) is told to give away all he has to the poor and to follow Jesus, which he balks at doing because he is very wealthy. The usual point is that the disciple of Jesus is not to “hold back” anything in following Christ. R. C. Sproul, however, took a different approach. Rev. Sproul pointed out that, in response to Jesus’ question concerning Torah observance, the young man, perhaps proudly, stated his adherence to Torah his whole life. In making this statement, the young man stated he followed all the Torah, including the first Commandment “You shall have no other gods before Me” and “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). But Jesus knew his heart that the rich young man trusted in his wealth before God, and therefore couldn’t give it up. The rich young man had put something in God’s place, though he probably didn’t even realize it.



The thoughts of Rev. Sproul spurred me to reflect deeper on this passage as it applies to my life. While great wealth is not a problem with me, I realized that I too have “many possessions” I’m not willing to let go. My possessions, however, are mental ones – theories, ideas, doctrines, opinions – often *about* God, that have taken the place of God in my life. Jesus asks us to give up our possessions, material or mental, and to take up our cross and be His companion.

The Christian mystical tradition has sought to illumine this truth through the ages. In the Carmelite tradition, St. Juan de la Cruz pointed out three paths available to us: The Path of Earthly Goods, the Path of Heavenly Goods and the True Path of Nada (Nothing). Of the three paths, only the third actually leads to God – all the others lead us to the gods of our own making. The Path of Earthly Goods is pretty self-explanatory – it’s money, possessions, power, “things”. These are what most of us would consider “idols” – things we make with our own hands/powers and call them gods. The Path of Heavenly Goods is a bit more subtle. These are the “benefits” of spiritual strivings – the “consolations”, visions, miracles, special visitations of grace. These too can become idols because they often are the result of our efforts. Here I find my possessions – my intellectual works to “find God”, but which end up only in mental mazes to nowhere, or, worse, to a cuddly,

comfortable idea of God. The third Path, the Path of Nada (Nothing) is where all the possessions, heavenly and earthly are given up and the soul encounters God with nothing. San Juan is famous for responding to a female disciple who asked about moving into this Path: "Nothing, Nothing, Nothing, even to the stripping of our very skin for Christ". What this means is giving up all of our ideas, our cherished beliefs, our images of God and settling for nothing less than encounter with God on God's terms not ours.

I recognize in "happening upon" this scripture and the accompanying talk by Rev. Sproul the Voice of Spirit calling me to let go of everything, abandoning myself to God on God's terms not mine. If God wishes an encounter of love so be it. If God wishes me to rest in faith in the "dark night", loving God even when there is no sign of God's Presence, so be it. But what God is calling me to is what God calls all of us to -- to not be satisfied! To say nothing!, nothing!, nothing! to what we have known of God and God's Love. Realizing that all our efforts to find God are only feeble stumblings and that all encounters with God comes entirely from God's side not ours. God is waiting for our bold, even impudent opening to God's Love!

Meditations on Practicing the Presence

By Rev. Myrella LeClair

This writing highlights Brother Lawrence's practice of the presence of God and his instructions on how to do so. He tells us how to "continually walk with God" - not from the head but from the heart. Brother Lawrence's writing, "Practicing the Presence" provides spiritual practices for a way of life available to "anyone who seeks to know God's peace and presence that anyone, regardless of age or circumstance, can practice -anywhere, anytime. " Brother Lawrence died in 1691, having practiced God's presence for over forty years.

As you spend time throughout the day with God, reflect on one of the following thoughts from Brother Lawrence. Select one thought and let it resonate in your heart and mind.

"We ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs just as they happen. "



"It is not necessary for being with God to be always at church. We may make an oratory of our heart wherein to retire from time to time to converse with Him in meekness, humility, and love. Everyone is capable of such familiar conversation with God, some more, some less. He knows what we can do."

“We must serve God in a holy freedom. We must work faithfully without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God mildly and with tranquility as often as we find it wandering from Him. It is, however, necessary to put our whole trust in God. We must lay aside all other cares and even some forms of devotion, though very good in themselves, yet such as one often engages in routinely. Those devotions are only means to attain to the end. Once we have established a habit of the practice of the presence of God, we are then with Him who is our end. We have no need to return to the means. We may simply continue with Him in our commerce of love, persevering in His holy presence with an act of praise, of adoration, or of desire or with an act of resignation, or thanksgiving, and in all the ways our spirits can invent.”

“I have ceased all forms of devotion and set prayers except those to which my state requires. I make it my priority to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I maintain a simple attention and a fond regard for God, which I may call an actual presence of God. Or, to put it another way, it is an habitual, silent, and private conversation of the soul with God. This gives me much joy and contentment.”

Spend as many moments as you can in silence and stillness with God. Learn but to “be still an instant” and just rest in God, and you will experience His Love and Peace. Practice that Presence by extending God’s Peace and Love to all whom you encounter.

Peace be with you as you strive to live in and practice God’s Presence.

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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.

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