



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Summer 2017

Summer the Season of Growth *by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

Summer has arrived and it has been a mixed bag for us. A couple of days of heavy rain and the rest of the week is a period of normal temps or the hot temps. At least we are not in a drought situation this year, and really not flooding either so that is really a blessing for us. Fresh fruits and vegetables are readily available at the many different farmer's markets in the area. For me, Summer is my favorite time of the year since I can get outside more frequently and eat the wonderful fresh food that is grown locally. One can even take different day trips to totally rejuvenate one's spirit and body.

As some of you know, I have a great love for Celtic Spirituality. I find it much more open and refreshing than much of what is found with many of the mainline churches. I received as a gift this summer the *Celtic Daily Prayer Book Two: Further Up and Further In*. I found a meditation that I want to share with you that really sums up so much of where I am coming from as a person, as a religious leader and as a spiritual advisor. This is a meditation found in page 891 – 892:

*I am not here to pass judgement
or point the finger at anyone.
My name was written in the sand
as one who is forgiven.
Strengthened with hope, imperious to shame,
I will walk freely like the freshness
of the dry lands after rain.*

*Let light spill out of heaven
through my life,
dispelling mediocrity and silent blame.
Too many people, guilt-stricken, wounded,
walk in regret,
feeling bad about failing,
apologies even for breathing.*

*Raw belief, a passion for others
grows in me,
encircling each moment
with instinctive prayer.
I will carry the freshness
of the dry lands after rain.
Compassion lives in me again.
-- Andy Raine*

For me, I have always loved the ancient ways of spirituality that help one feel the complete presence of God in everything. The ancient Celtic spirituality, the ancient desert fathers and mothers, the ancient monks of the Middle East, and Europe have always tugged at my heart. For me, that has always been my foundation even when I might stray to other traditions. I always find my way back to my foundation and there one finds so much peace. For me, I have realized that the world will go on doing whatever it is going to do, but I must be strong in my spirituality to be able to deal with that the world throws at me. Who better to learn from than those who walked that pathway before me and whose teachings have lasted the test of time.

With God, all things are possible!

In Remembrance of Mary Magdalene – Holy Myrrhbearer and Equal to the Apostles

by Rev. Myrella LeClair

In today's political climate in which some "Christians" regard women as not equal to men and even as no more than servants to men, it is important to remember that the First Apostle was none other than a woman, Mary Magdalene. Her feast is commemorated on July 22nd.

Mary Magdalene was the first person to witness the Resurrection and to proclaim the good news. Because Mary Magdalene was the first to proclaim Christ's resurrection to the Apostles, she is referred to as the "Apostle to the Apostles". Because she was the first messenger sent by Christ himself to announce his resurrection, she was also given the title of "Equal to the Apostles". Perhaps, the only title that Mary Magdalene would accept as of any importance is "Disciple". She was both a true believer in and a devoted follower of Jesus and His teachings since the canonical gospels name her as the only person to witness Jesus' crucifixion, his burial, and the empty tomb:

"A daring woman, whose heart was full of the joy of the resurrection, she went beyond her native borders and went to preach in pagan Rome. Everywhere she proclaimed to people about Christ and His teaching. When many did not believe that Christ is risen, she repeated to them what she had said to the apostles on the radiant morning of the Resurrection: 'I have seen the Lord!'" (Writing from St. Silouan Orthodox Monastery)



As a Jewish woman in the early first century AD, Mary Magdalene would appear to be an unlikely first messenger of Christ's Resurrection. Yet, her faith and discipleship never wavered. She demonstrated what it is to be a true believer and a devoted follower.

Regardless of our gender or gender identity, **we are all chosen** to proclaim the Good News – just as Mary Magdalene was. May God bless you as you continue on the path to true discipleship.

**Orthodox Hymns for July 22
Feast of the Myrrhbearer and Equal to the Apostles Mary Magdalene**

When God, who is transcendent in essence,

*Came with flesh into the world, O Myrrhbearer,
He received you as a true disciple, for you turned all your love
toward Him;
Henceforth you would yourself work many healings.
Now that you have passed into heaven, never cease to intercede
for the world!*

*Standing before the Cross of the Savior,
Suffering with the Mother of the Lord,
The most glorious Mary Magdalene offered praise with tears.
She cried out: What is this strange wonder?
He who holds the whole creation in His hand chooses to suffer:
Glory, O Lord to Your power!*

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

In the previous articles I reflected on tendencies today for many people to adopt a spiritual-buffet approach to their spiritual lives. This was shown to be characterized by frequently changing spiritual traditions, practices and beliefs, often combining or mixing practices from different traditions. While this is not a new phenomenon, it is perhaps more prevalent today due to increased communication between cultures and increased accessibility to knowledge. In this final article of the series I will reflect on how one can integrate differing spiritual paths, while maintaining a firm foundation in one's own integrity and while respecting and honoring the various cultures/traditions from which one might borrow.

When one feels drawn to explore other traditions, the first question one can ask is "Why?" Am I bored with my spiritual practices? Does my current body of belief still hold meaning for me? If our answer is boredom, our spiritual search might just be seeking for novelty. Not harmful in itself – humans are made to be curious and inquisitive. But if indulged in too frequently, one tries many spiritual traditions/practices without immersing oneself in them sufficiently to experience their depth and meaning. The Dalai Lama likened this approach to spirituality to a person who is trying to get to the top of a mountain and circles the mountain walking a short



distance on each path she/he encounters but then continuing to circle the mountain to the next trail up the mountain. The individual then follows that path for a short way before looking for the next path and so on. The Dalai Lama pointed out that this person might get to the top of the mountain eventually by walking a short way on each path, but it would have been easier to simply stick to one path and thus get to the top faster and more directly.

Sometimes our dissatisfaction with our current spiritual tradition/practice is a sign that the spiritual tradition/practice is "hitting home" and our dissatisfaction comes from our reluctance to see some uncomfortable facet of ourselves – what Carl Jung referred to as our *Schatten*, our Shadow. The discomfort could be embraced as a sign that this is a challenge we must face before breaking through to a closer walk with God.

But if one's desire to explore another spiritual tradition/practice is determined by her/him to come from a sincere drive to be closer to God, then the door is open to enter that tradition/practice. First, however, one must recognize that the tradition arose within a particular people – their history, experiences, sufferings and celebrations. To truly honor this history, one must honor, respect and love the people from which the tradition/practice grew.

Second, one must commit to follow the whole tradition/practice. It is not honoring to a tradition to use a particular practice or symbol and ignore the whole of the tradition from which it comes. I recently saw a video of a group of Christians visiting Israel. Several of the men had donned *tallitot* – the Jewish prayer shawl. This was seen as insulting to observant Jews because these Christians did not understand the meaning of the *Tallis*, and they certainly did not follow, or honor the Torah which ordered the wearing of the *Tallis*. I'm sure the Christians who donned the *Tallitim* were not trying to insult their Jewish hosts – but in their zeal – strong, but ignorant – they disrespected the very tradition which they thought they were honoring.

Finally, it is really helpful to have a *Anam Cara*, a spiritual friend, with whom one can discuss one's feelings openly and honestly. In the Orthodox Christian tradition this spiritual friend was called a spiritual father or *staretz*, as in Western Christian tradition this person was usually referred to as one's confessor or spiritual director. But a spiritual friend does not have to be ordained clergy. One's spiritual friend could be a next door neighbor and the spiritual direction occurs over coffee and Danish at a kitchen table. The important thing is that the spiritual friend feels comfortable with challenging and questioning an idea or impulse when needed. In my life, I have been fortunate to have a few spiritual friends, and I hope I have likewise been a spiritual friend to others.

My journey through spiritual buffet-ism has not been easy, but I feel I am coming to a place where I understand better how to recognize when it is time to “move on” spiritually, and, more importantly, when it is time to sit still, calm the mental chatter, and just wait for God. I pray blessings on all of your spiritual journeys.

Staying God-Centered in a Turbulent World *by Rev. Myrella LeClair*

With all of the hatred, bigotry, and violence that is occurring in the world – and particularly within the United States, it is easy to lose our spiritual perspective, that is, the God-given light that shines within and interconnects all of creation to its Creator and to each other. We have a choice to make about the chaos we perceive ourselves to be in: allow our minds and hearts to succumb to and dwell in the darkness of the present chaos **or** choose to turn toward the eternal Light that can never be extinguished and to spread that Light to all of creation. Every one of us needs to understand that God has not deserted us (and will never desert us) but rather that we have blocked out God's presence and direction by the choices we have made.

Hatred is similar to an aggressive cancer; the only difference is that it eats away at the spirit rather than the body. Once hatred has grown deep roots in the mind and heart, it is more difficult but not impossible to eradicate. When we need cancer removed from a body, we turn to a surgeon who attempts to remove all of the cancer and an oncologist who uses chemotherapy to rid the body of any other possible lurking cancer cells. We also need the equivalent to rid us of our spiritual cancer (hatred). In this case, Jesus is the surgeon and the Holy Spirit is the oncologist who leads and guides us through the process. Maybe that analogy does not make sense to you because you never had cancer or you do not yet understand that Jesus is the One who gave us eternal life through His resurrection (excising Death). When Jesus resurrected, He

gave us a Helper – the Holy Spirit to whom we can turn to help us stay spiritually cancer-free (spiritual chemotherapy) by following and practicing the Beatitudes as Jesus “prescribed” in His Sermon on the Mount as well as practicing His commandment that superseded all others commandments: Love one another. Jesus understands that our minds are both ego-centered and ego-driven and that we humans need a Helper (the Holy Spirit) to not only guide us through the transformation of our minds and hearts to being Spirit-centered but also to keep us focused on the Path of Light, that is within and connected to our Creator.

Let us rest in God’s presence as we pray: Holy Spirit, wise Counselor, beloved Comforter, and dearest Friend, help us to hear your quiet voice. Let us dwell with you every moment of the day as you guide us to light, peace and unity so that we realize we are one. Let us collectively allow the Light within us to shine upon the world today and every day! Together we will shine away the darkness.



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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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