



Monastic Musings

Winter 2013

Happenings:

Welcome to our newly formatted newsletter. This year's newsletters will be published quarterly. Both Mother Myrella and I will be trying to focus on one subject per newsletter. Hopefully we will be able to shed some light in areas of spirituality that will be of value to each of you, our readers. We are always open to questions and comments; so, you are welcome to contact us at the email listed in the copyright section of the newsletter.

Interfaith Spirituality

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

Although Mother Myrella and I are trained in both the Old Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox traditions, we find great spiritual enjoyment reading and studying many different faiths/spiritualities. Given this, we have elected to define our spirituality as an interfaith spirituality.

What do we mean by this? Well, basically it means that we take from different faiths/spiritualities that which seem to strengthen our spiritual faith. For the most part, we keep to the basics of the Old Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, and we add teachings from different



faiths/spiritualities in order that we can grow stronger in our personal spiritual walks. This will seem strange to many people since they have been taught by their church a set of beliefs, and they do not stray from those teachings. Something that we have both learned over many years is that no one religious tradition has all the answers as to how to live a full and joyful spirit-filled life. Practicing interfaith spirituality is not about uniting religions; rather, it is about listening to one another and learning to remove myths and falsehoods about other faiths from our minds. It is learning not to fear one another but considering the whole world as one family and being in tune with all of God's creations. Distinctions of race, faith, appearance do not matter. What matters is living and working together in harmony and respecting our differences. When you truly become spiritual, everything belongs to you and you belong to everyone. When you achieve that, you are free from the fear caused by the distrust in others.

Let's look at an idea for a moment. When Adam lived in the Garden of Paradise, he was in constant communication with God. Adam lacked nothing and he did not have a set of beliefs dictating how he should communicate with God. Adam still rested in God's heart. They just communicated without getting all caught up in some specific set of rules. It was not until the Fall that rules started to develop. Slowly as the earth developed and was populated by humans, all kinds of religious rules sprang up to separate people of differing beliefs. The rules were supposedly to help you find your way back to God using a prescribed course of action. The irony in that thought was the thinking that God had left us and we need to find our way to Him. However, we never lost God: we just lost living in the Garden! God is always with us and always

communicating with us. We are also not separated from one another other even if we do not have the same religious beliefs. As religious philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience...We are spiritual beings having a human experience." To put it another way, we like to see things inside out or upside down! We always say we are looking for our spirituality, but we don't understand that we already have what we are looking for: we are born spiritual beings but we don't remember that!

We both think about some of the stories we have heard over the years about children and God. Some parents were worried because their child had this "imaginary friend" who only they can see and talk with even though the child thinks the adult can see their friend. What we adults don't realize is that this friend is God (no matter what name is used) and the child (whose mind and heart are filled with innocence) is still very connected with God as a spiritual child of God. But as time goes on, we teach the child it is wrong to have this "imaginary friend". Anything not seen by an adult is an illusion, so the "imaginary friend" does not exist or worse yet, is a demon. Parents teach the child their religious beliefs and send them off to school where they learn everything possible of this world. Without realizing what we are doing, we are shutting down the communication that this child has with their Creator. We are "throwing them out of the Garden", so to speak. We are asking them to put aside their spiritual nature and be human. Then there comes a time in our lives when we realize that we have to "find our spirituality". So we start on a "road to discovery". Now what would have happened if we had allowed the child to have their "imaginary friend" for as long as they desired? What would have happened if we had taken the time to introduce the child to many different religious beliefs as they were growing up – to actually teach a child that God loves us all - that we are all equal in His eyes. (No, we are not saying to not give the child a church home, but we are saying to take the time to teach them honestly about other religions.)

How can we live in a world where there are so many different religions and instead of understanding one another, we constantly build fear and distrust about other religions? God is God – as he told Moses, tell them "I am who I am". God is unchanging, ever constant, ever present no matter what you call Him or what religion you practice. God is the source of everything. When we learn to open our minds and even our hearts to learning more about that which we do not understand, we will learn to see God in everything – that we remain the spiritual beings that God created.

After 9/11 we here in the USA were being "taught" that we should "mistrust or even hate" those who are from the Middle East, especially those who are Muslims. Why, we asked ourselves. Certainly, it was Muslims who committed terrorist acts that fateful morning, but they were not the "normal every day Muslims". They were extremists just like the Zionists of Israel at the time of Christ. Every religion has its religious extremists, who act based on hatred. Is it not true that which we do not understand, we fear? Is that not how we are taught to be? However, instead of fearing someone with different beliefs, why not take the time to sit and talk, asking questions in order to gain a better understanding. We both wonder what our lives would be like if instead of taking time to talk and learn from our Pakistani (Muslim) neighbors, we had chosen instead of to lump them with the extremists and feared and hated them. Indeed, we would have lost an opportunity to obtain a greater understanding of not only of the Quran and its teaching but of our Holy Bible's teachings as well! We gained two really wonderful friends who shared their faith as we shared our Christian faith. For we Christians, along with our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, come from the God of Abraham! Our understanding of the Muslim faith helped us to gain a much deeper understanding of our own Christian faith. It also gave us a chance to explore a different spirituality. We learned from one another. It was a time of sharing God's love as taught by our faiths - our spiritual selves communicating on a level that was beyond our human minds' capabilities.

We ask you to join us in this journey of spiritual discovery. Know that we will challenge you and each other as we explore different topics, beliefs, traditions, and spiritual practices. We are pilgrims on an inner journey. The means and the end are the same: to reawaken our spirits to

the God who has never left us, our “imaginary friend” who stills walks and talks with us. We need but be still and listen to His Voice.

Desert Wisdom

A Living Example

Hyperichius said, "He who teaches others by his life and not by his speech is truly wise."

Let Your Heart be at Peace

A brother asked a hermit, "Tell me something good that I may do it and live by it."

The hermit said, "God alone knows what is good. But I have heard that one of the hermits asked the great Nisteros, who was a friend of Antony, 'What good work shall I do?' and he replied, 'Surely all works please God equally? Scripture says, Abraham was hospitable and God was with him; Elijah loved quiet and God was with him; David was humble and God was with him.' So whatever you find you are drawn to in following God's will, do it and let your heart be at peace."

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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
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