



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 81: The Most Excellent Path, Part 2



Yamilet Sempe, *Path of Light*

*All of us, gazing with unveiled face  
on the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image  
from glory to glory,  
as from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
- 2 Corinthians 3:18*

"We are not the same as we were when we began. Some of the ascetical tools we may have used with good effect to support our spiritual journey in the beginning, or experiences that we counted on to sustain our progress, will no longer be appropriate, or at the very best, will need to be modified, reduced or dropped."

-Thomas Keating, *Manifesting God*

Fr. Thomas is alluding to how, as we continue on this journey faithful to our Centering Prayer practice, we are growing in faith. In the early days of contemplative practice, spiritual experiences and consolations encourage us to continue to deepen our relationship with God. In his life and teaching Jesus offered many signs and wonders to help his followers grow in faith to meet the demands of daily life.

As our faith matures, we are called to trust God and let go of our attachments to signs and wonders. We realize that in the struggles, the difficulties, the routines of daily life "God is present...above all, present within each of us, and within everybody else, and within the whole of creation." This realization is the contemplative dimension of life. God, not signs and wonders, is the foundation of our faith.

Fr. Thomas says that in Jesus' time God was thought of as transcendent and unapproachable. Many of us may have been taught similar ideas. In *Manifesting God*, Fr. Thomas says:

In Jesus' teaching God is so close and so present that you don't have to go anywhere to find him... He is already here, that is, living within us and present in the particular circumstances of the present moment as well as our reactions to them. Through the practice of contemplation, we can access the mystery of God's presence within us and manifest the power of grace in the practice of unselfish love. This is the 'most excellent way' that Paul recommends.

## A Meditation

Those who have gone to the depths—of suffering, awe, or silence—discover an Indwelling Presence. It is a deep and loving 'yes,' an 'amen' or 'let it be,' that is inherent within you. In Christian theology, this inner presence is described as the Holy Spirit: God as immanent, within, and even our deepest and truest self.

Some saints and mystics have described this presence as 'closer to me than I am to myself' or 'more me than I am myself.' This is what Thomas Merton called the True Self. It is inherent in all of us, yet it must be awakened and chosen. The Holy Spirit is totally given – and given equally – to all; but it must be received, too. One who totally receives this Presence and draws life from it is what we mean by a saint.

The True Self – where you and God are one – does not choose to love as much as it *is love* itself already (see Colossians 3:3-4). The True Self does not teach us compassion as much as it *is compassion*. Loving from this core of your being is experienced as a river within you that flows of its own accord (see John 7:38-39). From this more spacious and grounded place, one naturally connects, empathizes, forgives, and loves everything. We were made in love, for love, and unto love. This deep inner 'yes,' that is God in me, is already loving God through me.

- Richard Rohr, Daily Meditations, "Your True Self is Love," Sunday, December 18, 2016

## **To Practice**

- View the video excerpt "The Most Excellent Path, Part 2" which is about 27 minutes in length.

- Fr. Thomas says, "We are not the same as we were when we began." Not only are we not the same, but our concept of God is not likely the same as when we began. How is that true in your life today? How have you been called to trust in God?

## **Resources for Further Study:**

You may wish to read Chapter 6, "'Jews' and 'Greeks' as Metaphors of Spiritual Progress" from *Manifesting God*.

## **Notes and Reflections:**