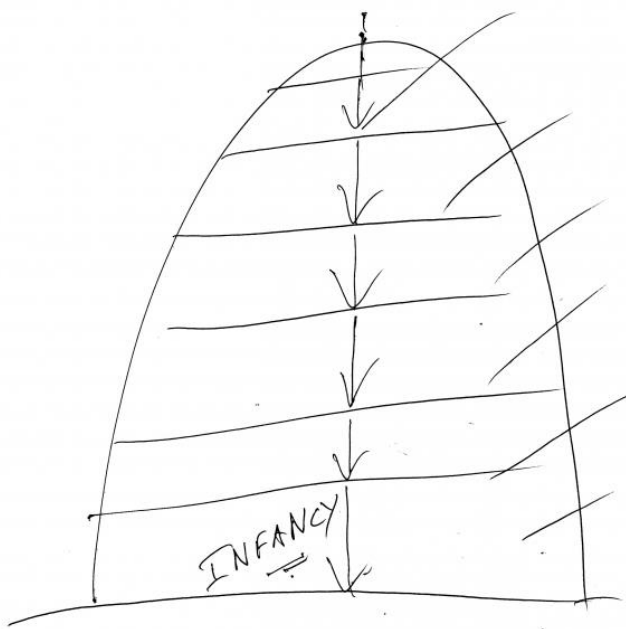




THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

49: The Archeological Dig and The Spiral Staircase



The last two sessions and in this session, we are exploring the psychological experience of Centering Prayer, which sets the stage for Part 4 of our course, The Divine Therapy. The last two sessions we talked about the levels of awareness of our being and the seven moments of Centering Prayer. This session and the next we look at the archeological dig and the spiral staircase, basically the same models we looked at in the last two sessions, but from a different view.

Fr. Thomas calls the Holy Spirit the divine archeologist. Like an archeologist who starts a dig at the top with the most recent civilization, the Holy Spirit starts to heal our present relationships and addictive behaviors. We may experience "the springtime of the spiritual journey," with a certain freedom as our emotions begin to normalize. As the archeologist moves to more ancient material at deeper levels, so the Holy Spirit moves to deeper levels, corresponding generally to the emotional chronology of our psyche. We then move from the springtime to the real work of the spiritual journey, which Fr. Thomas says is a series of humiliations of the false self. Remember, this is a journey of the diminution of the false self. When we start to experience these humiliations, it is a sign that we are moving closer to the center where the fullness of God is experienced. God is always inviting us to a new level of maturity and trust.

It's important to note that our healing is a journey that takes place over time as we grow in trust and humility, and God is always one step ahead of us, guiding us and leading the way. Sometimes we may feel that we continue to experience the same issues over and over, but the analogy of the spiral staircase shows us that we are experiencing them at a different level with new eyes. As we go down in the process to new levels of surrender, faith, and love, at the same time we are moving up to new levels of freedom, growth, creativity, humility and trust. We become more capable of consenting to the goodness of life.

"We are called to a deeper humility, which in turn calls for a greater trust and an all-encompassing love of God. In a sense, the bottom and the top meet or collapse into one another. Humility and boundless confidence in God's infinite mercy merge, and the ongoing journey becomes whatever God wants it to be."

- Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*

A Meditation

"God, I offer myself to you,
to build with me and to do with me as you will.
Relieve me of the bondage of self
that I may better do your will.
'Take away my difficulties
that victory over them may bear witness
to those I would help
of your power, your love, and your way of life.
May I do your will always."

- adapted from the Third Step Prayer of *Alcoholics Anonymous*

To Practice

- View the video excerpt "The Archaeological Dig and the Spiral Staircase" which is about 11 minutes in length.

-The Third Step Prayer is about surrender, as is this teaching about the healing work of the Holy Spirit. God always gives us the option of remaining where we are or taking the next step on the journey. Where are you with your willingness to surrender to this healing work?

Resources for Further Study:

You may wish to read Chapters 3 and 4 in *Intimacy with God* (20th anniversary edition), Chapters 7 and 8 in older editions.

Notes and Reflections: