

Reflections

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*"My hosanna has come forth from the crucible of
doubt."
Dostoevsky*

My Poor Work

The Truth is not mine no matter how wise or deep it is.

The People to Convert are not mine no matter how much I want to help them.

I am solely called to bring the truth to the people. To give to those (who are not mine) a gift (that is not mine). Nor does God need me to spread His grace.

My work does not benefit God because he is perfect. My work is my teacher. It teaches me how to love. How to receive God's gift with humility, praise, and thanksgiving. How to give God's gift with humility and generosity.

My Poor Work teaches me Love.

Innocent Suffering

The Cross is the only way to explain how a good God can allow suffering and evil to happen to the innocent. But the fact of the matter is that he does not just simply allow this, but he blesses us with it. He does this because it is his most sweet and loving way to kiss mankind. To draw mankind out of themselves and into the radical sacrificial love of the Trinity. Of the Son for the Father, the Father for the Son. God created a world that would allow men to love as God loves. To go beyond themselves, to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgiveable.

Only in doing this can man rise above his concupiscence. The innocent will suffer but it is this suffering that opens the door to a radical love. For charity is amplified in the midst of suffering. This is the cross of Christ and this cross is the only way to partake in the divine love of the Son and the Father which is the Holy Spirit. The cross is the garment of God's bridal chamber. Amen.

Our Beautiful Wounds

Sins are the visible effects of our wounded nature. To truly overcome sin we must heal our wounds. Our wounds are wrapped in many layers of coping mechanisms. Through prayer, silence, reflection, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the wounds can be rediscovered. Once discovered they need to be addressed, the causes forgiven, and healthy new ways created to deal with the pertinent issues behind the wound. The final closure of a wound is declaring that God is good because one fundamentally understands that it was through the wound that God loved us and saved us somehow.

Just Being With God

The excitement of conversion is thrilling. There is so much to learn, so many shrines to visit, so many new feelings of love to be experienced. But then things slow down. There is still movement forward to be sure. But the speed is much less. The novelty of conversion is diminished.

But I think now it is time to recognize that I am at a plateau. Not that I will slow down and be less active in my faith. But that I realize that the mission God has for me, is right here. That I need to embrace the gift of an apostolate that is grounded. That I need to learn how to just be in God's presence. Active but loving rest.

Therefore, I beg Mother Mary and all the saints to teach me how to be. To teach me how to relax. To teach me to love the present.

What is Truth?

*Truth is infinite
Because God is infinite.
Yet truth is completed in Him.*

*Truth is objective
For God cannot deny himself.
Veracity reveals it.*

*Truth is the Beatitudes.
Simple ones obtain it.
Blessed be the Meek, the Humble, the Poor...*

*Truth is paradoxical.
To obtain truth one gives up the world
To gain more than the world.*

*Truth is God.
It binds and affirms in love,
Is purified by the sword.*

*Truth is in diversity,
The originality and complexity of creation,*

Yet it is contained in unity.

*Truth is all and yet not all,
It is mysterious and yet apparent,
Truth is disclosed in silence yet openly paraded.*

*Truth salves the soul,
It wounds the proud
And blesses all.*

*Subjectivity falls to it,
Skepticism is swallowed by it,
Relativism fears it,*

*All want truth,
Yet not all love truth,
Truth reveals the heart.*

*But truth is.
So we are forced to bear it.
So we are compelled to find it.*

The Depths of Suffering

God has bound me.

I cannot sin mortally because sin is pointless.

I cannot end my life because Hell is obvious.

I cannot enter heaven because God has not yet called me.

All I can do is suffer.

I cannot be depressed because I have hope.

But I cannot rejoice because my life seems like darkness.

All I can do is suffer.

God teach me this love. This love that I cannot feel. This love that is tethered spiritually to your saints who are being made in this furnace of life. Teach me this love that is patient, that is kind, that is generous, and giving. But that I can never feel, can never enjoy, can never experience. This love that seems to be only faith, because it is.

The Beautiful Cross

I pray that I will prefer boredom to pleasure; suffering to excitement; sacrifice to fulfillment; virtue to sin.

Lord lure me into your kingdom with drudgery. Fulfill me with monotony. Let my life's toil consume me. Please preserve me in boredom so that I do not fall victim to the lavish sensuality of sin.

For boredom will be my honey; suffering my dew; and sacrifice my smile.

Lord I will love you through the pain for you quench my thirst with suffering. Such sweet nectar, such a beautiful flower.

Always keep me under the cross, for with the cross I am safe. And then when I too am raised with the outstretched arms of love, please have mercy on me. Amen.

Obedience

When God calls me to do mighty things, I will do mighty things through His power.

But when God calls me to small things, they will be mighty because they are done for Him.

Obedience is my song to Christ!!!

The Gift of Suffering

This life is not about creating heaven on earth. This life is about learning how to love.

God continually allows suffering and disaster to enter our life to give us new opportunities to love greater.

Therefore, God does not reward the man greater who succeeds in accomplishing more good works than someone else. He awards the man greater who has tried to love and give of himself whether his works succeed or fail.

It is not the result that God commends it is the attempt and the effort. For God could and will wipe away every trial and tear at the end of time.

Until then we must continually work to try to make the world a better place not to make it perfect but to grow in love.

The Gift of Doubt

It is only because of doubt that we have Faith. And it is only by doubt that our Faith can be strengthened.

So do not fear doubt, because God Himself allows it.

If our Faith is to be strengthened it must be tried. And though by ourselves we are weak and would fall for anything. With God we are strong. So as we go out to spread the Truth of the Catholic Faith we must daily come back home. It is through the sacraments of Confession and Holy Eucharist and through the wonderful elements of the Faith such as Holy Scripture, the Rosary, and the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament that we will strengthen our Faith amidst doubts and trials. So though I fear the mighty beasts of the forest, with God I fear nothing and can do all things. I leave not out of pride but out of Love. Lord teach me this Love, teach me this Trust!!!

Lord, Let Me Not Be Discouraged!

When my good ambitions are foiled. When my friends fall to sin.

When I do not see the fruits of my work.

When my prayer is dry. When I feel incapable of helping this world. When I am confused and disheartened by Your mysterious plan.

When those who I pray for turn even further from you. When my prayers are not answered on my timeline. When Your mercy is not given to those I love.

When I become discouraged by this world. When I think all is lost and all my works of love are unfruitful.

Lord, Let Me Love You Still!

Sweet Jesus on the Cross, I Love You!

Sweet Jesus on the Cross I am So Sorry for All of My Sins!

Sweet Jesus on the Cross, Please Save Souls!

Sweet Jesus on the Cross, I place all my trust in You!

Lust

There is a lie yet I cannot see it. I see joy, I see beauty, I see innocence. Yet this is just a mask. Underneath is a world of hurt. People who yearn for love. And if I saw that, my heart would go out to them. But no I am blind.

Perhaps it is because of a lack of communication. I can only love what I know. Therefore, if I cannot communicate I will only love the surface. A surface that has been finely shaped but is burning within, just like the earth is filled with fiery lava below its cool exterior.

The more one's pains and weaknesses are revealed the more human they become, the more I can love them.

But its that first contact, that is overwhelming. They look perfect, act perfect, and smile without wounds. I am drawn and say it is you my "God". Perfection, Innocence, Beauty: at last. And my body cannot understand why I retreat. Why I flee.

I am then torn. Heated and yearning to again see my "God". But knowing that it is not he, but a wounded soul masked as Him. And yet I cannot sense that it is not Him. All I can do is obey and flee.

I am praying to develop a sense for discernment of this evil. To be able to turn with ease and not flee with yearning. So I pray. I fear my own weakness. Yet I have no other recourse but to trust in God that he will keep me pure. Oh God, may I be humble enough to flee as a fool rather than to remain and die in my confidence.

A Reflection:

Merton's 'Contemplative Prayer'

Prayer is an act of love and trust in God. To be authentic this has to be complete with no hidden agendas. When done in this manner, prayer can transform oneself into a more complete and self aware Christian. Thomas Merton, in his book 'Contemplative Prayer', steps the reader through authentic prayer and provides the reader with signs to guide his/her journey to spiritual union with God.

Thomas Merton begins his discussion on prayer by forewarning the reader that there are no 'magic' tricks to develop a deep spiritual life. In fact, he comments that as soon as one thinks that they have found that trick, they have then stepped out of an authentic spiritual meditation. Instead one needs to enter every prayer for one's entire life always in the mindset of a beginner who knows nothing on his own and is totally dependent on God.

However, a soul that continues in his pursuit of loving God through prayer will begin to discern signs of a healthy spiritual life. Contemplation and meditation can never be selfish and it must be founded on complete love of oneself, of the world, and of God. First of all, we must completely embrace God's will for us in our life, including accepting ourselves and loving ourselves exactly as God has made us. Secondly, we must embrace a radical love of the world in our prayer. Prayer is not escapism from the problems of the world but an entering

into these problems at a deeper level. Finally, prayer is an eternal quest to love God just as he leads us to love him.

This love of God must be authentic. Merton describes it as love, "by purity of heart and [with] tears of compunction." (56) Honest prayer will lead to the de-masking of ourselves. As Merton says, "Finding our heart and recovering this awareness of our inmost identity implies the recognition that our external, everyday self is to a great extent a mask and a fabrication." (87) When we come to this understanding we can begin to shed these masks that prayer will bring to light. In time, we will begin to sense who we truly are and how God truly sees us. This nakedness and defenseless vulnerability is the childlikeness that God praises in the Gospel. When we come to prayer with such innocence and purity of heart we are inclined to be freed from our false attachments and open to a radical trust in God.

We also must understand that these gifts of a spiritual life are never permanent. Just as the manna in the desert lasted but a day, the gifts of prayer are gifts for the moment and can be easily lost if taken for granted. We must always enter into prayer as desperate beggars with an eternal and daily need of God's grace, mercy, and faith.

Authentic prayer is pure love and pure freedom. It is a preference to always walk into the desert of emptiness and poverty, with complete trust that God will provide what is needed. True meditation is not a seeking to know about God from a theological perspective, but a desire to grow in an understanding of how God loves us. The moment

we try to grasp onto God and to quantify his nature with our reason, we leave contemplation. Contemplation is entering into a mystery that is beyond us and that we can only know that we hunger for.

This mystery is marked at times by paradoxes. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:6-10, “We have to be pure-minded, enlightened, forgiving, and gracious to others; we have to rely on the Holy Spirit, on unaffected love, on the truth of our message, on the power of God. To the right and left we must be armed with innocence, now honored, now slighted, now traduced, and now flattered. They call us deceivers and we tell the truth; unknown and we are freely acknowledged; dying men, and see we live; punished, yes, but not doomed to die; sad men that rejoice continually; beggars that bring riches to many; disinherited, and the world is ours.” Hence a deep spirituality with deep prayer will embrace the freedom of St. Paul’s paradoxical and yet so wonderfully true description of Christ’s disciples.

One of these paradoxes is the unity of contemplation and action. Merton says that contemplation should be always preferred and desired over action. However, he concedes that action is necessary to be truly Christian. Therefore, he says that a Christian should seek to combine the virtues of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. These virtues of penitence in Lazarus, action in Martha, and contemplation in Mary lead to an authentic Christian. However, Merton cautions when he says, “There is no contradiction between action and contemplation when Christian apostolic activity is raised to the level of pure charity.... But the trouble is that if prayer is not itself deep, powerful, and pure and filled at all

times with the spirit of contemplation, Christian action can never really reach this high level.

This is the challenge that Christians are daily called to: to remain contemplative in a society of countless distractions. However, this challenge is the path to a deeper holiness. It is a path of insecurity where our own strength is of little value. Hence, we are called to daily put on the armor of Christ and to trust completely in His divine assistance on our every step of the journey.

Chapter 13 discusses the unitive stage of the spiritual life. This stage is marked by a deeper union with Christ with the paradox of a jarring feeling of disunion. The soul is robbed of spiritual fruit and comfort, and is asked to remain faithful to God without consolation. It is a period of abandonment of our faculties of reason, emotions, thinking, and even faith. All that supported and built our faith is seemingly taken away. The Christian who God endows with the grace to walk this road is purified to such a state that they can seek God with nothing but hope.

St Gregory the Great leaves the reader with an excellent definition of the contemplative life in the following statement. “The contemplative life is to retain with all one’s mind the love of God and neighbor but to rest from exterior motion and cleave only to the desire of the Maker, that the mind may now take no pleasure in doing anything, but having spurned all cares may be aglow to see the face of its Creator: so that it already knows how to bear with sorrow the burden of the corruptible flesh and with all its desires to seek to join the hymn-singing choirs of angels, to

mingle with the heavenly citizens and to rejoice at its everlasting incorruption in the sight of God.” (62)

Also St. Gregory of Nyssa provides this excellent quote in his definition of the mystical night. “Night designates the contemplation of invisible things after the manner of Moses who entered into the darkness where God was, this God who makes of darkness his hiding place. Surrounded by the divine night the soul seeks him who is hidden in darkness. She possesses indeed the love of him whom she seeks, but the Beloved escapes the grasp of her thoughts....Therefore abandoning the search she recognizes him whom she desires by the very fact that his knowledge is beyond understanding. Thus she says, ‘having left behind all created things and abandoned the aid of the understanding, by faith alone I have found my Beloved. And I will not let him go holding him with the grip of faith, until he enters into my bedchamber.’ The chamber is the heart which is capable of the indwelling when it is restored to its primitive state.” (101)

Hence Merton, supported by the many father’s of the faith, explains that contemplative prayer is a journey of the soul to God. It is marked by signposts that a soul receptive to the Holy Spirit will be able to identify. However, contemplation in the end comes down to a gift given by God. It is something that we can only prepare our souls to achieve by cultivating the Christian virtues. However, we can never obtain the gift through our own effort because the gift of contemplation is God himself and our finite human condition can never grasp His infinite reality. We

must just open our hearts and souls to daily seeking and loving him, and continually beg for an ever increasing union with him.

*Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. New York, New York: Herder and Herder, 1969.*

The Path to Lukewarmness

How does the innocent child become an evil adult? It seems to happen sometime during those turbulent teenage years. And if these years are so difficult, why did God create them to be so? Why could not the transition from childhood to adulthood be one smooth transition?

The answer to me lies in the fact that the teenage years are necessary because they open the person to the reality of something great. To something that is insatiably appetizing and infinitely beyond themselves. Whatever, that particular soul is destined to adore in God, they will be first attracted to in the flesh. And these inner movements begin to show themselves in the teenage years. In essence all of the yearnings or indulgences in sex, drugs, popularity, excitement, movies, education, friendships, music, etc. are reactions to the infinite desire for God in each of our souls.

Lukewarmness develops after the bad is repeatedly chosen. This is because this vice becomes the limit of one's capacity to reach beyond his/herself. When a sin is continually committed, with no yearning or desire to flee from this evil, the person becomes bound by that sin. That sin becomes the way the person feeds their infinite desire for God. And this poison serves to extinguish the God-given and deep desire for God himself in one's soul. Hence the person becomes comfortable in their sin and their appetite for something greater than the sin is externally extinguished. Lukewarmness.

The only thing that can change this is a radical change or loss of something good and moral that the person holds onto in another realm of their spiritual life. This could be the loss of a friend's life, the collapse of one's society or philosophy, or perhaps the divorce of one's parents. These losses reopen that infinite yearning in one's soul because they encounter a problem that cannot be fixed. The problem is infinite, so they must look for an infinite solution. God.

But if again the bad is chosen to drown out the pain of this new wound the soul will quickly reenter into its old state of lukewarmness. This is because the infinite wound is capped by a finite fix. A fix that boxes one in even further. This narrowing of one's yearning for God eventually stifles all thought of God, such that God becomes an unreal possibility in the mind of that poor soul.

To combat this flight into lukewarmness, one must hate sin. Even if one gives into the sin repeatedly, the sin must constantly be hated and revolted against. Continue to bring the sin to the Sacrament of Confession because this is truly the most powerful weapon to break the power of the temptation. By doing these things the sinner will keep the spark of God within them, and when God comes they will be yearning for His infinite beatitude.

Relativism

Maybe the root of relativism is disobedience. A constant blind drive for individuality that is fearful of commitment and permanent rules. A need to always be one's own moral compass because of a fear of a superior's intolerance. In a sense relativism has its roots in the Protestant reformation. A movement that resulted from a yearning to be free from the decadence of the Catholic church in the 1500's. Yes the church was corrupt and stagnant during that time. But through all that it still spoke and held the truth. It was mired in sin but was still the voice of Christ. The revolution of freedom from this dictatorship of apathy in the 1500's brought a surge of people who yearned to love God more freely, more purely. But their freedom was their demise. Their independence brought forth the fruit of personal morality. They became their own gauge of holiness. Could God do that to us? Could he justly turn on us and say that he was starting over? We would be appalled. And yet he has all the power and all the rights to do such a thing. Look how much we have sinned, and yet he comes to earth to save us during the act of our greatest sin, deicide!!!

Yet our patience for his church was not limitless. We rebelled and asked for freedom. We became un-Christ-like by not loving the sinner in all patience. We hated the church and the popes and the bishops. All of whom were sinners, lost in their pride and power. And yet they were sinners who were simply blind to their sin. We lacked mercy and decided that we knew better.

Now today we are in a splintered world. So many truths that we are utterly confounded. So many versions that leave us dizzy. So we salve our wound with relativism. This easy answer makes everything 'ok' and we are capable of living within the wounds of the torn Christ. His bitter wounds do not even affect us. We can smile and dance and even sin all with the false 'hope' of God's acceptance of relativism. Oh blood and water of Christ crucified open our hearts and our minds to the need of obedience. Obedience is our freedom from relativism. Obedience is our paradox that leads to the sweetest love of Christ. Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

The Gift of the Catholic Faith

There is a beautiful mystery of the Christian faith that can only be entered into when one pledges himself to the often bitter cross of obedience. Christ's greatest act of love was to die for us on the cross. For us to come to Him we must climb our own cross and join him. Not that our effort will add any benefit to His perfect sacrifice, but it is the only way that we can learn how to Love as he Loved. To utterly deny ourselves and to love others with all our being. For Catholics our cross is often our church. We are led by sinners and sometimes people who do terrible things. But it is only in the radical love of these poor souls, by denying our very own selves, that we can ever tap into the gushing font of Christ's endless and superfluous love. Thereby it is only by entering into this deep love of sinners that we can begin to fulfill Christ's tear filled prayer of 'oneness' in the Gospel.

The sadness of the Protestant reformation is that it removes the opportunity for this radical love. A protestant is on a continual search for the purest way to love God. Which is good in itself. But an underlying premise of Protestantism is that if the current structure of authority is not deemed holy enough, the person has the right to seek a better way to worship. This freedom and individualism is foreign to a Catholic rooted in their faith. Why? Because as explained above this robs the Christian of the capacity and opportunity to enter into the

deepest radical love possible of Christ and of humanity, that of total self surrender to oneself.

It must be asked how this is better than a complete and unwavering love of the scripture and of God that is professed by the Protestant faiths. Because truly these people are blessed with a profound love of God rooted in scripture, and many of these faithful Christians would gladly die for their belief. Therefore, this is undeniably authentic and wholesome love of God. However, in making the above point, it is not assumed that the love of God is wrong through other ways. Instead, what is assumed is that no love can match a wholly crucified love. A true Catholic professes in their soul unequivocal belief and love of God and scripture. However, they just as vehemently profess an equally deep love and radical commitment to the Faith and the sinners in the church. This radical commitment is a sheer leap of trust, with a full knowledge that their generosity will be sometimes abused and their aspirations often thwarted. But it is in so doing that the person frees themselves from all selfish intentions. It is a complete trust in God of all things. An embrace of all good and bad as somehow the will of God and a precious gift from God. And therefore this is wholly crucified love, complete self abandonment, and the pinnacle of a human's ability to express love. It is where the human love meets the divine love of God.

The greatest examples of this type of love are Catholic saints, men and women who are truly fools!!! They are incredibly gifted individuals who throw all of their freedom away. They place themselves under the foolish vow of obedience to human superiors. Superiors who

are often sinful and at times downright unchristian. Catholics do not hide that there is sin in the church, in fact we proclaim it that we are all sinners. But the irony is that these foolish saints do not abandon their vows of obedience in the midst of all this. Instead they radically love those who sin the most. It is not a love that is superficial, but a love that they enter fully into with the strongest commitment of a wholly unified love. A love so strong that they forget themselves, they happily suffer with the sinner they are trying to love. They want nothing but the sinners well being. Their love becomes so great that they would gladly go to Hell and suffer for all eternity so that one sinner could have the opportunity to love God even for a second. (Exodus 32:32) It is a radical love, an incomprehensible love. It is not a love that can be taught but only one that can be entered into. One that can only be embraced by embracing a church full of sinners, by joining Christ on the cross.



“Do Whatever He Tells You”

(John 2:5)