



The Unity Part of Community
Part One The Devine Presence in The Human Reality
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I would like to take up a point from our visitation again for this month's statio theme. Mother Angela wrote: "Community life is a real challenge in this priory house due to considerable differences among the members...."

"A painful reality can be perceived, although it does not manifest openly, that there are certain divisions in the community. There seems to be a lack of deeper ongoing mutual communication and understanding among the Sisters."

Sisters, first I would like to say, I have yet to live in a community where there is complete unity. That is not possible in our human condition. All people have the same problems. But, let us not say that unity is hopeless. In reflecting on what supports and does not support unity among us, I "saw" our congregation logo. It is a cross with four "directions or sections" united by the circle with "Christ as the center". Then I started to reflect on what four elements are involved in this UNITED CROSS. I thought of four aspects of our call to be united in Christ:

- The Divine
- The Human
- The Wounds
- The Healing

All four of these are too much to take up in one conference, so for now I will take up the first two, the divine and the human. In the January Statio (or perhaps in Lent) I will take up the last two: the wounds and the healing.

The Divine

God Himself is TRINITY-UNITY. To be loving, caring, and united is the very essence of God. When we commit ourselves to be one with Christ as a Missionary Benedictine Sister, we choose to become UNITED in CHRIST. We choose to seek God in a new unity, a new family. We choose to make this group of people our PRIMARY (FIRST) COMMUNITY.

While, of course, our connection to our family of origin is always a part of us, we choose to place our focus and our energy with this new community.

Actually, for all Christians, the quality of relationships IS AS IMPORTANT as the quality of prayer life. In truth, they are not separable!

“If we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.” 1 Jn. 4: 12

“If anyone says, ‘My love is fixed on God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen.” 1 Jn. 4: 20

Recognizing Christ in the other is really NOT AN OPTION FOR any Christian (“What you do to the least you do to me!” Mt. 25), but even more so for A BENEDICTINE!!!! Benedict is extremely clear about this incarnational theology. He builds the structure of his program for spiritual growth on the importance and quality of the RELATIONSHIPS OF THE MONKS TO ONE ANOTHER:

“This, then, is the GOOD ZEAL which monks must foster with fervent love:... respect.... support with greatest patience the weaknesses of body or behavior.. prefer what is good for the other...”

This, I might add, is why I believe we stand *statio* and process in together. It is a sign that we support each other on our way to Christ; we walk to God together; we show our REVERENCE together to God and to God-present-in-one-another.

So, when find DISUNITY, being against another sister, disgust, backbiting, or disdain we are killing the foundation of our Benedictine Community and...our relationship with God! We are seriously going against our profession to seek God here, with these sisters!

We are called to DIVINE TRINITY-UNITY. I know this is “impossible” for humans. Yes, but God is calling us to this! It is God’s Work in us! We must give ourselves to this grace of God. We must be ready to be changed...to be transformed.

“For man it is impossible but not for God. With God all things are possible.”

Mk. 10:27

“For nothing will be impossible for you.” Mt. 17:20

If you do not want it, desire it, it will never come, because you will not be open to the grace. Human beings, by their nature are self-oriented. It is only by a conscious choice that we can move out of ourselves and our own selfish wants, our own righteousness, our own perfectionism... to consider another. In fact, this is why we are called to COMMUNITY, so that every day we will have others to practice with. We are given one another so that we can grow in being more like Christ.

Human

The mystery of the Incarnation which this season of Advent calls us to specially consider, is that God decided to become human for us. God has chosen not only to be among us, but in each one of us (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16). And, as we said above, for Benedictines, it is through our companions that God calls us and speaks to us.

So, what about that sister that drives you crazy? What about the one who seems to be misplaced in this community? She may can be used as an instrument of God for you.

One of my most favorite passages on community come from the section of “The Bothersome Brother” in the book, Christ in the Brother by Abbot Fidelis Ruppert, OSB, and Fr. Anselm Grun, OSB. It says that the early monastics experienced that Christ speaks to us precisely through those who bother us the most. It is the person who appears most unlike Christ because she insults and hurts me that is looked upon, by the desert monastics, as a physician sent by Christ himself. It is this person who will tell me the most about myself (if I dare to listen).

From these early monastics we hear, “When someone remembers a brother who injured or insulted him, he must think of him as a physician sent by Christ and look upon him as a benefactor. If you are annoyed, your soul is sick. In fact, if you were not sick, you would not suffer. Be grateful to the brother, because thanks to him, you now recognize your malady.”

Psychologically, they tell us to be attentive to what bothers us about another. Our irritation will tell us infinitely more about ourselves than it will tell us about the other person. Herman Hesse says, “What is not in us does not disturb us.”

A very important part of the spiritual journey is to stop focusing outward at the darkness of others (although that is also probably there), and go the long, painful, deep journey into the darkest, most despised corners of your own heart. Unless you once can meet yourself there, you will never know true understanding and compassion. Only when you meet your own deepest pain, can you truly understand the darkness and pain within another.

I remember very clearly finding myself one day in this dark corner. I remember one moment when I stood in my bedroom feeling stripped, ashamed, empty. This one moment did not happen by itself. It came as one bead in a “string of pearls”. Some of those “pearls” were black, dark, hard, difficult, but ever-precious experiences that helped me come to my truth. Some of those “pearls” were white, nurturing, supportive people and situations that gave me strength so that I wouldn’t despair. But, I came to that moment like King David before the Prophet Nathan. David judged the man of Nathan’s parable as deserving death. Then Nathan said, “That man is you!” (2 Samuel 12) It was only then that I could see that the judgments I was making over and over about others was my hidden anger at my own darkness that I was unwilling to face. It was only then that I stopped blaming others for my pain and my life made a dramatic shift.

In the book Christ in the Brother I found this story about a merchant of Petersburg and the staretz (wise man) of Optita. The merchant goes to the staretz to seek spiritual advice; he said, “My servant girl has quit, and now friends advise me to get a girl from the country in her place. What do you say? Should I hire her?” “Yes,” replied the staretz, “Hire her.” Some time later the merchant wrote, “Father, permit me to dismiss her; she is a veritable demon. Since she is in the house I know only anger and disquiet. I am no longer in control of myself.” The staretz responded, “Under no circumstances send her away! She is an angel whom God has sent you, so that you may see how much anger is hidden in you. Your former girl would never have been able to show it to you.”

“She is given you to help you see your own darkness and you will be making a mistake if you dismiss her, shun her, or blame her for your problems...” It doesn't mean SHE IS RIGHT AND YOU ARE WRONG. It simply means that God will use this person to help you to see the truth about yourself. This is why silence and deep reflection are essential to the spiritual journey. They help us to sort through and discern such experiences.

Signs that I Am Not at Peace

The book Anatomy of Peace (published by the Arbinger Institute, USA) says that I may think of myself at peace while at the same time being caught up in very unpeaceful thought patterns. Sure signs of heart-disturbances are:

1. I blame others for the way I feel or for the actions I choose. His or her behavior, words, attitudes are my problem.
2. I “horribilize” others. This means I focus on and possibly exaggerate the wrongs or faults of others.
3. I exaggerate the differences between myself and those I am blaming.
4. I exaggerate the importance of anything that will help to justify what I feel or do. I can even exaggerate good things in myself just to prove how “wrong” I think another person is.
5. I feel as though I am a victim to other people’s choices; I feel powerless.

The book explains, when I review problems areas of my life, it is very helpful to look closely at what my mind is saying. When we remain in the “judging” pattern then we remain locked and unhealed. Justifications and blaming are signs that my heart is not at peace.

The basic premise of this book says that when we betray ourselves or our basic sense of what is right, then, subconsciously we find need to release the guilt or tension that is created when we look on our own wrongdoing. So, we (perhaps subconsciously) find a way to justify ourselves (excuse our behaviors). There are four main ways in which we do this:

1. I think of myself as better than others around me, and therefore, I...
2. I think of myself as deserving more than I am experiencing, therefore, I...
3. I think of myself as less than others, therefore, I...
4. I think that I “must be seen as...”, therefore, I...

These are ways of excusing my own behavior. You could also say that they are ways that I adjust my thinking so that I can feel OK when I'm not really OK.

The Better-Than Box

<p>View of Myself Superior Important Virtuous/Right</p>	<p>View of Others Inferior Incapable/Irrelevant False/Wrong</p>
<p>Feelings Impatient Disdainful Indifferent</p>	<p>View of the World Competitive Troubled Needs me</p>

The I-Deserve Box

<p>View of Myself Meritorious Mistreated/Victim Unappreciated</p>	<p>View of Others Mistaken Mistreating Ungrateful</p>
<p>Feelings Entitled Deprived Resentful</p>	<p>View of the World Unfair Unjust Owes me</p>

The Must-Be-Seen-As Box

<p>View of Myself Need to be well thought of. I am a fake.</p>	<p>View of Others Judgmental Threatening My audience</p>
<p>Feelings Anxious/Afraid Needy/Stressed Overwhelmed</p>	<p>View of the World Dangerous Watching Judging me</p>

The Worse-Than Box

<p>View of Myself Not as good Broken/Deficient Fated</p>	<p>View of Others Advantaged Privileged Blessed</p>
<p>Feelings Helpless Jealous/Bitter Depressed</p>	<p>View of the World Hard/Difficult Against me Ignoring me</p>

These are thoughts of a heart not at peace. These are thoughts of a person excusing her own behaviors. Notice your patterns of thought. Notice when you experience conflict with others or when you have conflicting thoughts in your mind or your heart. Notice when you

have had some of the thoughts or feelings mentioned above. How do such thoughts catch or even imprison you?

You may think the way to get away from these patterns is to focus on changing your thinking. Actually, the way to get away from such patterns is to become aware of yourself. These thoughts and feelings are signs of a deeper concern within yourself. They are signs that there is something inside of you that is not at peace. This is where you ask for the grace to see. "Lord, I want to see." (Mk 10:51) This is your work!

Again, let me say, this doesn't mean the other person is right, it just means that if I focus on the other person's problem, I will never come to peace because

1. I cannot make the other person change and, therefore, I doom myself to an unhappy life if I stay focused on her.
2. I will never have the energy (or courage) to face my own inner issues which are blocking my path to freedom and peace.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that our call to Community-Unity is a call from the Divine Trinity to live in Divine-Unity. It is a call to become more and more true to CHRIST. Perhaps what I am saying is that maybe we are not finding unity and peace because there is static or confusion blocking our hearts/vision. We are caught up in negative projections. Perhaps we are not united because our hearts are not at peace, and our hearts are not at peace because we fear to face our inner darkness so we get caught up looking at the darkness of one another.

JUDGMENTS DIVIDE, COMPASSION and UNDERSTANDING UNITES.

Maybe these questions might help us:

1. Do I desire to live in unity with my sisters and am I willing to deepen my way of seeing and understanding her?
2. When someone wrongs me where do I "spend my mind-energy", in judgments or in seeking understanding?
3. When my sister fails, do I tend to blab the story and/or "kick her down", or do I tend to meet her with openness, truth and kindness?
4. Do I find myself caught in one of the "boxes" above? What might I be avoiding? What do such thoughts tell me about myself?
5. Consistently what disturbs me in others?

In Advent we will have a Chapter of Renewal focusing on the living INCARNATION of the WORD MADE FLESH.