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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial

page 2

**STATIO CONFERENCE
LECTIO DIVINA**

by Windhoek Priory

page 3

PROPHETIC SPIRITUALITY

By Sandra Schneiders

page 6

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St. Scholastica's Priory

Manila

Dear Sisters,

A BLESSED EASTER TO ALL OF YOU! Easter has a special significance to us in our country today, because during these 9 years under GMA, we have seen a deterioration of our economic, political and moral life. We can still blame the economic problem due to world recession. But the failure in governance, the breakdown of institutions, the blatant violations of the law by those who are supposed to uphold and protect it, the worsening corruption and erosion of moral values and even of basic decency all have internal roots. Thus we look forward with special longing for EASTER, because it is a triumph of GOOD OVER EVIL, LIGHT OVER DARKNESS, LIFE OVER DEATH.

Today our struggle is no longer mere political or economic, but is a struggle against principalities and powers, over diabolical brilliance that manages to divide and conquer, to use law for its own ends, to disregard legitimate wishes and rights of peoples, to sweep away whatever comes in the way of its ambition and addiction to power.

LORD OF GOODNESS, HELP US TO VANQUISH THE POWERS OF EVIL.

Darkness of lies and deception characterize relationships. Truth is expendable. Those who commit themselves to truth are persecuted and marginalized and in fact threatened. Those who lie are rewarded.

JESUS, WHO IS THE TRUTH, HELP US TO DISSIPATE DARKNESS WITH YOUR LIGHT.

The culture of death reigns. Life is cheap. Activists are victims of extrajudicial killings or illegal arrests. Whistleblowers are assassinated. Political oppositions are massacred.

LORD OF LIFE, TEACH US TO VALUE LIFE.

As we celebrate Easter, let us renew our commitment to LIFE, to GOODNESS, and to TRUTH.

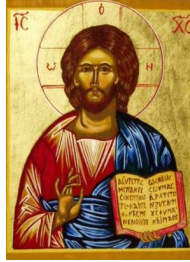
Lovingly yours,

A. Mary John Manangan OSB
Sister Mary John Manangan, OSB

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

LECTIO DIVINA

by
Windhoek Priory



Jesus, my Rabbuni, - my beloved Teacher!

Lectio Divina is our Spirituality for Missio

*“In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God and the Word was God.
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

We saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-14

The **Scripture** is the sacrament of the **Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ**, who came down from heaven for our sake. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, continues being present. *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word will remain forever!”*

The Word of God is Spirit and Life. It needs to be assimilated and incarnated in our life in order to be proclaimed and witnessed. *“The Word that is the faith we proclaim, is very near you. It is on your lips and in your heart.” Rom. 10.8*

“To be in the heart of the Word of God!” Pope Benedict

“The Word of God is a ladder, on which we can climb up, and with Christ we can climb down into the depth of Divine Love. God’s face becomes visible for us in Jesus Christ. Before we can say: ‘I am yours’, he already says to us: ‘I, Jesus, I am yours!’ We must be in the search of the Word of God with our whole being.” Pope Benedict

“God is without limit and so is the Word of God universal and without limit and end. If we enter into the Word of God, we enter into the universe. We leave our own limits behind.”- Pope Benedict.

“The Word of God became a human being and said to all of us: ‘I am yours!’ In the Eucharist he says to us every day anew: ‘I am yours’, so that we become more and more able to answer: ‘I am yours!’ so that we shall be in the heart of the Word of God.” Pope Benedict

***“Blessed are those, who hear the Word of God!”
“The word is being fulfilled today even as you listen.”***

There are four steps of monastic tradition: ***Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio.***

The fifth step is our mission. The Word of God waits for an answer.

Lectio: Listen to God with faith, openness and availability. There is a mysterious connection between the text of the bible and the context of our life. Jesus is our Rabbuni, our beloved teacher, the Incarnate Word of the living God, who wants to teach us every day anew. Let us “*listen with the ear of our heart.*” *St. Benedict*

Lectio is like Advent, which prepares us for the mystery of Incarnation: *Come Lord Jesus*, come into my life! Holy Spirit, transform me into the likeness of Jesus! At times we fail to profit from *Lectio divina*. “*Be patient until the Lord is coming!*” The seed needs time to grow. Call upon him, call and trust!

Jesus, my beloved Rabbuni, what do you want to tell me today? I am here for you and I want to listen to you! “*We need to believe that the Word is Jesus Christ himself who is reaching out to us.*”

Meditatio: We grasp the meaning of the text for us. We even start feeling as if the text had just been written for us, for the particular situation we are living in. *Meditatio* arouses attitudes of awe, trust, joy, repentance, sorrow, courage, compassion. This is the moment when *Meditatio* leads to *Oratio*. Sometimes we return to *Lectio* or very quickly *Meditatio* becomes *Oratio*. One flows into the other, like the waves of the sea, flowing forward and backward in a natural rhythm.

Oratio: We pray the chosen text! The Holy Trinity has entered into a dialogue with us. Prayer is a response to God’s self-gift to me in the reading. We are close to Jesus, our beloved Rabbuni. Our prayer can take a form of thanksgiving, trust, adoration, praise, intercession, repentance, etc. We ask questions. The Holy Spirit will enlighten us. The Word of God that has been spoken to us becomes a prayer within us. For us it is a real love-hour! We are totally depending on God. (*Oratio* continues during the day.) We experience his loving influence in our life, which introduces us into *Contemplatio*. Prayer, when fervent, flows into contemplation.

Contemplatio:

- Take your time for God alone. In *Contemplatio* one is in the presence of God, the Holy Trinity itself. To be in his presence requires discipline; (don’t run away if you feel empty and dry!) “***You in me and I in you!***” *Contemplatio* is a pure gift of God, which is freely given by the Spirit. We cannot do it ourselves! *Contemplatio* is the growing moment of *Lectio Divina*.
- *Contemplatio* is a complete and peaceful surrender to the loving embrace of the Holy Trinity. We desire simply to stay in the presence of God in order to allow him to touch us and make us instruments of his love.
- Centering prayer can help us. Let us give God our time; let us believe and trust! He alone can transform our life. Saints are sinners who trust and try and try again.
- Our intention is of far greater importance than our attention.

- Let us surrender fully to God in body and mind: Let us be with open hands before God: Lord, you may take out whatever you want, you may put into my hands, whatever you want. I am yours!
- Contemplation is only possible through an act of faith. It is God's work, not ours. Our share in God's operation is to cooperate, to surrender, and to listen. Our deep desire is: *"I want to gain Christ and be deeply united with Him"*. (St. Paul) Lord, you take the driver's seat!

Missio: The Word of God waits for our answer.

The process of *lectio divina* is that the Word of God becomes flesh in us. The Word of God is Spirit and Life (John 3:63) It needs to become flesh in us in order to be proclaimed and witnessed.

The Word of God leads us into communion with the Triune God. After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, *"The Word of God continued to spread and to grow!" Acts 12, 24*

"In a powerful way the Word of the Lord kept spreading and growing stronger." Acts 19, 20

When the Holy Spirit speaks to the Church today, he calls us to be witnesses of God who is Love.

- *"Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* John 13,35
- *"Love one another, as I have loved you!"* John 13,34
- *"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you! Remain in my love!"* John 14

"Transformed and energized by the blissful encounter with God during lectio divina, we feel empowered to open ourselves to the world in order to proclaim and to witness the power of God's love in our participation in the mystery of Christ. Love is contagious." Guido Oliana, MCCJ

The bible is a temple, where the bride listens to the Word of God, who is love. With a burning heart she goes out and proclaims. Gradually the Word takes flesh in our daily life. Difficulties are not a hindrance, as we see in the life of St. Paul and our first missionaries, who did not give up:

"We cannot, but proclaim!" "In all we triumph through Him, who loves us!"

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you!"

Guide Questions for Reflection:

1. Is *Lectio Divina* precious to you? Why?
2. How can you further deepen your *Lectio Divina* that you become even more united with Christ and bear fruit in your Missionary Benedictine way of life?

PROPHETIC SPIRITUALITY

By Sandra Schneiders

Prophecy is not primarily about foretelling the future. It is about telling what time it is, what it is time for, in the present. As Rabbi Abraham Heschel put it, the prophet's "essential task is to declare the word of God to the here and now." Jesus is the prophet par excellence, the one who announced that the time is now and what it is time for is the Reign of God. Prophecy requires three things: a clarity of vision and acuity of hearing that is a participation in God's view of history; the ability to announce that vision effectively both to the powers which oppose God's Reign and to the people who are oppressed by those powers; and the willingness to pay, even with one's life, for the ultimate triumph of God's covenantal order, the Reign of God.

First, the prophet has to see, to hear, from God's point of view. As Heschel says, "the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with the divine pathos." The immediacy to God and the marginality to the social order that the religious attempt to live is directly ordered to sharing God's perception of humanity in history, to the cultivation of sympathy with the divine pathos.

The choice of celibate solitude is ordered to contemplation, the actualization in prayer of immediacy to God. Contemplation is the place, the locus, of the coincidence of the contemplative's view with the divine view. If there is one theme that Merton returned to more than any other it is that of contemplation as the entrance of the human person into the sphere of God. In contemplative prayer, according to Merton, we pass through the center of our own being into the very being of God where we see ourselves and our world with a clarity, a simplicity, a truthfulness that is not available in any other way. And it is this view of reality which the contemplative must bring to bear upon the social order. For the religious, celibate solitude has as its primary purpose the fostering of such contemplation within which the religious participates in the divine perspective from which prophecy arises.

The second requirement for prophecy is the ability to speak the vision to both the oppressor and the oppressed. To the former the prophet must speak a message of criticism and a challenge to conversion, and to the latter a message of hope energizing action toward a different future. Walter Brueggemann in his marvelous book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, says that the first task of the prophet in speaking the vision is public lamentation. To lament is to declare, not by denunciation or condemnation but by public weeping, that everything is not all right. The guardians of the status quo, those who own, operate, and profit from the going system, want the oppressed to believe that everything is basically as it should be, that the system is designed and guaranteed by God, and that eventually all the minor problems will be remedied. The prophet

says that the system is not God's plan; that God is on the side of the oppressed, of those whom the system grinds up and presses down; that the system does not have minor problems but that the system is a major problem.

The second task of the prophet is to recall God's promises and so, by projecting a vision of an alternate future, to engender hope. Hopelessness is a surrender to inevitability and the unchangeableness of the present arrangement. Those who control the system do so by paralyzing the imagination of the oppressed through the control of language for what cannot be said cannot be thought or sought. The prophet is one who has a fund of language that does not come from the system. It comes from the Word of God. With this new Word of promise the prophet can seed the imagination of the oppressed with the images that subvert the conviction of inevitability and divine legitimation of the system and engender hope for a different world.

Immediacy to God and social marginality are what equip the religious for this double prophetic task of public lament and energizing hope. In solitude and prayer the religious experiences the divine pathos for God's people. Sharing the divine pathos does not result in a new political program to rearrange the available pieces of the social puzzle but in a lament that will not be silenced, a howl of protest from the heart of the desert. It is the weeping of Rachel for her children who are no more; it is the lament of Jesus over Jerusalem which does not know the time of its visitation. But contemplative immersion in God also results in a new vision derived not from the status quo but from God's promises, in new images that will energize alternative strategies, in new language for the saying of things we were not supposed to think. Amos Wilder called Jesus' discourse in parable "the language of the Kingdom," a new idiom voicing things hitherto undreamed and unleashing energy toward a new creation?

Social marginality plays an especially important role in the prophetic task of announcing God's Word in the present social, political, and religious situation. While much can be done from within the system to ameliorate its worst effects there are few people who are willing and able to cut off the institutional branch on which they are sitting. To be on the edge, as Jesus was, gives one a certain freedom to see what is really happening and to say what one sees regardless of the consequences. Merton spoke often of his marginal situation which he valued because it gave him the distance which enabled that critical balance which is something "the monk owes to the world or the monastic life has a certain prophetic character about it " .

The third requirement for prophecy is the willingness to suffer, even to die, for the sake of the newness one is commissioned to announce. As Brueggemann says, the prophet speaks only "at great political and existential risk".

Immediacy to God in contemplation and social marginality is the source of strength for those who dare to criticize the establishment, whether secular or religious, and for those who energize the people for change. Prophets, from Moses on the far side of the Jordan to Jesus in Gethsemane, from Martin Luther King, Jr., on the balcony in Memphis to Dorothy Day in the soup kitchen in New York City, from Oscar Romero in the Cathedral of El Salvador to Teresa Kane in Cathedral of Washington, D.C., have testified that the willingness and the strength to lay down one's life for justice's sake comes from face to face encounter with the living God who hears the cry of the poor.

Social marginality makes the prophet a natural target for establishment violence, both secular and ecclesiastical. The prophet lives on the edges of the system, not just physically but ideologically. The rules of the social order do not have a self-evident priority for the prophet for whom the presumption is not in favor of the establishment's values but always in favor of God's justice for the oppressed. Thus, the prophet not only challenges the law but when necessary breaks it and encourages others to do the same. This is a dangerous way to live and, as Jesus remarked, the tombs of the prophets are eloquent testimony to the tension between "social order" and prophetic criticism (cf. Luke 11:45-52). In a sense, prophets court death, physical or spiritual, because their vocation is not to survive within the system but to change the system.

Undertaking such a prophetic task will not be looked upon tranquilly by either the ecclesiastical or the civil establishments. To repudiate the understanding of Church and state as intrinsically unequal societies, to undermine the ideology of obedience as religiously mandated submission to those in power, to call into question the simple equation of office with authority, and to re-imagine obedience as contemplative attention to God in every situation is to threaten the system which keeps believers sheep in the Church and citizens pawns in society. It is to energize people for autonomy and responsibility. Those in power rarely surrender it willingly, and so those who would undermine that power for the sake of Gospel freedom must be prepared for the fate of all those who have claimed that it is better to obey God than humans.