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St. Scholastica's Priory

Manila

Dear Sisters,

The first Sunday of November, which is usually our Statio day happens to be All Saints' Day. So it prompts us to ask ourselves : What is a Saint? What is the meaning of being holy? Some think that you have to be beatified or canonized in order to be a saint. Or at least you have to be a Catholic or be a Christian. I came across a definition of holiness which makes sense and yet does not have these requirements. Renee Miller writes:

The actual root word is *hool* with "w" placed at the beginning, and it literally means whole. **The simple duty of us all becomes nothing more, nothing less than becoming whole.** Holiness is the process by which we integrate the loose threads of our life into a whole tapestry of beauty and divine grace. This is a creative task for the entirety of our lives. The Good News is that we can set aside all the to-do lists of things that we think are required for reaching some standard of moral and spiritual perfection, and open ourselves instead to the invitation and creative possibility of becoming whole in God.

Doesn't that make a lot of sense? To me it does. In my experience, if you ask me if there is a living person whom I would describe as holy, I think of a Frenchman, who is not only not a church-goer, but is even a Trotskyite. He is married to a Filipina, a friend of mine. Why do I consider him holy. Because I have witnessed how gentle, humble, unassuming he is. I have seen how groups took advantage of his generosity and turned that generosity against him. But he was never bitter and when these groups were in need and asked him for help, he went out of his way to help them. And then his wife got sick with cancer. He stopped working and served her hand and foot, cooking for her, washing her, tending to her every need. And the word that comes to my mind when I am with him is : wholeness, wholesomeness, integration. I don't think he will ever be beatified or canonized. But he is certainly an excellent human being. Is that not what a saint is? Think about it.

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

125TH JUBILEE STATIO CONFERENCE

SIMPLICITY AND PURITY OF HEART

By Peramiho Priory

“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

Early Monastic Teaching We seek God. Our early desert abbas and ammas believed the way to find God was through purity of heart. Their teachings have come to us through “The Great Bridge”, John Cassian. In his first conference, Cassian speaks through Abba Moses, “The aim of our profession is the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. But our point of reference, our objective, is a clean heart, without which it is impossible for anyone to reach our target... Everything we do, our every objective must be undertaken for the sake of this purity of heart... in order to rise, step by step, to the high point of love.” [John Cassian: the Conferences, Colm Luibheid, tr., the Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press 1985, 37, 39, 41]

Benedict also speaks, but just once, of purity of heart: “We should also realize that it is not in much talking that we shall be heard, but in purity of heart and tearful compunction.” (RB 20:3) In addition to this passage, we can imagine that Benedict is also making a reference to purity of heart in RB 52:4, “But if someone, perhaps, wishes to pray privately at some other time, let him simply go in and pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and full attention of heart.”

While both of these references are related to prayer, our lives are an integrated whole and one cannot pray differently than one lives. Terrance Kardong, OSB, says, “For Cassian, and no doubt for Benedict, purity is primarily a question of single-minded focus. The person with a pure heart is concerned with God alone; all else is secondary or nonexistent.” [Benedict’s Rule, a Translation and Commentary. The Liturgical Press 1996, 216] Nothing else matters that cannot be directed to the One Goal. “That in all things God may be glorified.” (RB 57:9) “Hold Christ more precious than all else.” (RB 5:2)

Many Roads, but One Direction It helps me to imagine that my heart has many roads. I spend my life traveling these roads. Purity of heart is when each road has one basic direction, Christ.

- My prayer is one of the roads, and when practiced sincerely, it leads me to Christ.
- My relationships with my sisters, my community life and ministry are roads where I love and serve Christ and am loved and served by Christ.
- My family, friends, my leisure activities, all are roads ... directed to the One Goal, Christ.

To seek God alone does not mean that I set my gaze so heavenward that I have no space or thought for the people and things of this world. Above all, Benedict teaches us to recognize the Christ-Presence in each person and in all things. To “prefer nothing to the love of God” (RB 4:21; 72:11) means the love of God in heaven and God present here in this world.

I find that the words of Thomas Merton, a great Cistercian Benedictine from the United States, encourage me toward purity of heart. Merton wrote: “Seek one thing alone: to purify your love of God more and more, to abandon yourself more and more to his will and to love him more exclusively, and more completely, but also more simply and more peacefully and with more total and uncompromising trust.” [What is Contemplation, Templegate Publishers, 1950, 64-65.]

The Divided Heart However, often I find myself “off the track.” My heart is broken, divided, cloudy and not at all feeling “pure”. I agree with the author of Proverbs who writes, “Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure?’” [Proverbs 20:9] We seek for wholeness, but because of our pain, we sometimes lose clarity and settle for shallow compensations. Seeking healing and completeness, we often cling to things of the earth. Life becomes confusing and compromising. Although not written from a spiritual perspective, I find the words of Stephen Covey challenging when he writes that we get caught up in the “thick of thin things” [First Things First by [Stephen R. Covey](#), [A. Roger Merrill](#), [Rebecca R. Merrill](#)]. Consequently, we become restless, tired, joyless and perhaps even depressed. When Benedict refers to “purity of heart” or “full attention of heart”, he also speaks of “tears” or “tears of compunction”. I call them “tears of awareness”. We become aware that so much seems to have been lost, wasted or misguided.

Coming to the CENTER Our ordinary, simple monastic life quietly, yet insistently, calls us to release the weak, paper-thin images we have of ourselves and the false promises of our busyness. Our monastic profession and practices dare us to go deeper, to go to the CENTER.

However, the journey to the CENTER, involves the stripping of everything that is false, not true, or not free. Thomas Merton wrote: “When everything is taken away, you can still be free and that is true freedom, and this is why we are here, to find this out. It is good sometimes to have everything taken away so that we are ‘forced’ into this freedom. Most of us have to be ‘forced.’ This freedom comes only with grace and the nearness of God. God is identified with our inner self which remains even if everything is taken away. ‘Everything’ can be gone, but God is in our ‘center’ and that center is all that is left when we die.” [“Center” Thomas Merton, No published source that I know of.]

“Where your treasure is, there also is your heart.” (Matthew 6:20). There are two “measuring sticks” that help me unveil my treasure: my mind and my time. My words can easily profess Christ as the center of my life, but the way I spend my time and the ramblings in my brain clearly reveal the real treasure within. The chattering of my brain often uncovers a lot of unhealed wounds and relentless cries. When I overflow with criticisms, murmuring, fault-finding, lethargy, anger, judgments (toward myself and/or others), I am not free. When I find myself clinging to things, control, money, prestige, power, my heart is not pure. Unfreedoms rear their heads like dragons, devour my time, my energy, and compete against my best efforts toward love and peace. It is then that I often find I “don’t have time” for prayer, for lectio, for community, for rest. My heart is not “pure.”

Conclusion We seek God. This is our goal, but our immediate objective is how we live here and now. Our simple, but freeing, monastic practices are the tools given us to help us grow in simplicity and purity of heart. Our liturgy, lectio, work, community life, obedience, *conversatio*, stability, simply, yet persistently, beckon us to release the superficial, to risk going deeper, and be refreshed again at the ONE FOUNTAIN. Although sometimes the challenges of our monastic life are painful, even stripping, when lived mindfully, and by choice, the force of these experiences can lead us to greater truth, freedom and joy of heart. They lead us to God. Daily we continue our ordinary practices, and seek the ONE alone. In this, we rise, step by step, to the high point of love. For one whose heart is pure, Christ is a living, personal experience of love. “Let us prefer absolutely nothing to Christ and may he lead us all together to everlasting life.” (RB 72:11) From His fullness we will all receive, grace upon grace. (Jn. 1:16)

Guide Questions for Reflection:

- When do I feel clearly directed to Christ? When am I aimless or compromising in my purpose?
- What consumes my energy, thoughts and actions? What do I deeply desire? Am I living it?
- What am I afraid I will lose if I really surrender all to Christ?
- What excuses do I easily make that “exempt me” from faithfully living the monastic practices and the total surrender of *conversatio*, obedience, stability?
- Who is a model of purity of heart? What do I want to learn from him or her?

Creation at the Heart of Mission

Denis Edwards



This is an extract from a presentation by Australia theologian Fr. Denis Edwards at a May 2009 conference in Assisi, Italy, examining Ecology and Mission. It involved religious leaders and institutes from 50 countries.

Conversion is central to Christian life. Following Jesus in the 21st century will involve ongoing ecological conversion. The scope and intensity of the ecological crisis challenge us in a radical way. No other generation has had to face up to human-induced global climate change, and the knowledge that their action or inaction will determine the future of life on the planet.

Conversion to the Earth, to solidarity with the creatures that make up our planetary community, must involve action. To be led by the Spirit at the beginning of the 21st century is to be involved with what Thomas Berry describes as the *Great Work*. This *Great Work* is to carry out the transition from “*a period of human devastation of the Earth*” to a period when humans will “*be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner*”.

To make this transition will mean expanding our moral community. Theologian David Toolan says that “*we need to expand our moral concern to include plants, animals, air and water and soils*”. We need to recognize that we are one species among others, but, at the same time, we must accept responsibility for the future of the planet. Morality must now mean accepting responsibility for climate change, for the state of the fisheries and the future of the Earth’s rain forests.

Toolan locates this ethical challenge in the deeper place of the human being’s role in the emerging universe and in the evolutionary history of life on Earth. It is only with us, with *Homo sapiens*, that the atoms born in stars can become mindful of the meaning of things, so that they can begin to decipher “*the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world*”. Toolan says that human beings are called to give soul to the universe. Human creatures are the ones who can consciously give praise, who can lift up creation to God in love. As Sean McDonagh, one of the prophets of ecological praxis, says, “*our unique human vocation is to celebrate the beauty and fruitfulness of all life on Earth*”.

Christian ecological action is grounded in celebration. It is grounded in the Eucharist. But it issues forth in personal and political action. Paul Santmire reclaims the tradition of the martyrs

for ecological theology, pointing out that to be martyr means to be a witness. He sees the church of today, empowered and driven by the Spirit, as challenged to rise to the occasion of these times—as martyrs in other eras rose to the occasions that were thrust upon them. The challenge is to allow the love of God in Christ Jesus “*so pour into our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that it overflows abundantly, not only to persons, especially to those in great need, by also to the other creatures of nature*”. We need a new form of the martyr church.

How then will this martyr church in the ecological and cosmic age love nature? Passionately and persistently and pervasively. Santmire says, “*We Christians will be a voice for the voiceless, for the sake of all creatures of nature who have no voice in human affairs. We will listen to the plaintive cries of the great whales and hear the groaning of the rainforests, and we will be their advocates in the village squares and in the courts of power, by the grace of God. All the more will we hear the bitter wailing of the little children who live on the trash mountains of this world and who wear clothes that have been washed in streams overflowing with heinous poisons and who sometimes drink these very waters.*”

The witness of the Christian community will be carried out in workplaces, in neighbourhoods and in homes, and sometimes in political and activist groups. It can and must be lived in the very way we go about our daily lives. Very often the praxis of individual Christians will be done in collaboration with others far removed from the life of the church. But, as Santmire suggests, there is also a place for ecclesial action where the church itself witnesses in the public arena through its structures of leadership.

Listening to the Spirit may well lead Christian believers to get involved in political action through activist and lobbying groups. It will certainly involve a critical challenge to the dominant economic and political model based on market forces and endless consumption. It will mean accepting that the resources of the Earth are finite, that current Western consumption patterns cannot be sustained by the wider human community, or into future generations, and that they bring death and destruction to other species in our planetary community of life. It will mean personal and political options in support of renewable sources of energy, alternative forms of transport, the conservation and re-use of water, the designing of energy-efficient buildings, the protection of habitats, the limitation of urban sprawl, and the attempt to bring life and beauty to our cities. It will mean living more consciously and more fully in a local area, in a particular bioregion.

The challenge to find the living God in solidarity with the poor of the Earth remains an enormous challenge for Christian faith in this coming century. Commitment to the poor and commitment to the well-being of life on this planet must go together as two interrelated dimensions of the one Christian vocation. Ecological conversion is not opposed to, but intimately involved with, conversion to the side of the poor.

Global Warming: a Human-made Oven

Shay Cullen SSC

Shay Cullen has worked in the Philippines for nearly 40 years.

The most powerful and deadly typhoon to hit the Philippines, Taiwan and China in August left hundreds dead and millions of dollars in damage. Landslides in Taiwan buried entire villages. In the Philippines, highways were swept by floods as if nature was wiping down a table. The warming oceans have increased the shocking ferocity, magnitude and frequency of storms that repeatedly sweep in. Runaway melting of huge sections of the ice caps at the poles and the resulting rise in sea levels are causing irreversible damage and the eventual disappearance of low lying islands like the Maldives.

Gloom and doom? Yes! That's the stark reality and enormity of the task facing the community of nations that will meet in Copenhagen 7-18 December this year. The leaders have to agree to massively reduce the burning of fossil fuels and stop the emissions of CO₂; also to change to wind and solar power and other non-polluting, non-nuclear means to generate electricity. Besides this, humans have to adapt to simpler, less wasteful and environmentally destructive lifestyles. We should be recycling nearly everything and turning to organic food production on a massive scale.

The UN-sponsored meeting has to create strong enforceable global contracts to stop CO₂ production, end forest destruction, replant billions of trees, promote organic farming and reverse the poisoned march of chemical farming. We, the public, need to support these UN-brokered planet-saving measures and help reduce global warming that is so destructive to life. If humans are in biblical terms "stewards" of the beauty and magnificence of God's creation, we are failing miserably.

Making these changes in our way of inhabiting the planet will cost a great deal of money. That burden lies mostly on the developed world, China and India that burn most of the fossil fuel in coal and oil-fired plants to generate electricity.

For those who deny that the planet is heating up for the first time in 11,000 years, they need only to see the resulting natural disasters. Humankind is now an agent of change in the geological and environmental history of the evolving planet. It is change that is not good for humanity: the planet's food supply has evolved and thrived in a cooler climate and if the temperature keeps rising with all the greenhouse gases we are pumping into the sky, there will be massive crop failure, droughts and price increases that will cause food riots and massive social unrest.

What bothers me the most is that a lot of that CO₂ is absorbed by the oceans. The seas are more acidic now than they have been for millions of years and life just cannot survive in acidic waters. The sensitive corals die and then the plankton and the bigger fish and then people.

Millions of poor coastal dwellers around the world depend upon fish. Besides, massive irresponsible commercial fishing fleets are over-fishing the oceans with kilometre wide nets and fishing lines and are driving many species to extinction.

The once great forests that girdled the planet were great absorbers of CO₂ that helped grow more trees but they are not there as before. They have been cut down to provide land to grow corn and grass for millions of cud chewing cows so the rich can eat beef. The cows pass millions of tons of methane gas into the atmosphere, adding to the thick blanket of gas around the earth that is blocking the escape of heat from Earth's Sun-scorched surface. The growing of more crops like corn, means millions of tons of nitrogen are used and the run off into the oceans is a poison killing off all life. Dead zones now affect 245,000 sq. km of ocean waters. We have created poisoned oceans and an atmospheric oven in which we are cooking ourselves and the planet to death.

Becoming a missionary is a life-long process. It is a call to action that gives idealism an opportunity for action, where the desire and spiritual commitment to serve and help can be fostered and strengthened by doing it rather than talking about it. That's why I advise missionary training to be less scholarly and monastic and more of a practical apprenticeship in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth. He was a man of action and wasted little time. St. Columban was the same. He left the monastery and went out on mission to confront and change the evils of the world. He never hid away from a challenge; he was a doer, less a talker.

We missionaries, especially new volunteers, need to be doing many things to bring the gospel message to the poor and the needy. It is hard for young people to be cloistered for seven years while the planet burns, refugees starve, and children are abandoned and abused. The temptations to such a life of scholarly ease are many.

AS TIME GOES BY

By Sr. Philomena Roche, OSB

It seems hard to believe that nearly twenty years have passed since I left the Philippines in 1990 after the Baguio earthquake, and was assigned again to Kalumburu, where I had another five years before coming here to Norfolk in 1995.

So I am happy to see the following sisters again who have come here for the International Formators' Meeting: Sisters Adelaida, Imelda, Pauline, Mary Vincent, Marissa (not so long as she was here for a few years) and Sr. Remedios de los Reyes. She was a novice when I went to the Philippines in 1986. Not one of these sisters looks anything like twenty years older! Last but not least, Mother Mary John who arrived from Spain a few days ago and leaves tomorrow.

I was also pleased to receive cards and greetings for my 60th Jubilee from the Priory House Community, Mother Angelica and the Manila Community, the Baguio Community, Sisters Baptista, Mary Jerome, Winfrieda, Rosalie Mujar and Virginia. God bless you all.

I keep in e-mail contact with Sisters Catalina Dery and Barbara Martha who were both in Kalumburu. So, together with the remaining four sisters of the thirty seven I lived with in the enclosed Benedictines in Sydney, Australia, and the three Spanish sisters from the 16 I knew in New Norcia, West Australia. You Filipina Sisters will always remain in my memory.

I should add a Thank you to Mother Mary John for permitting Sisters Carmel and Leah Ann to come here to Norfolk as they do so much to help us.

Oremus pro invicem!

“That in all things God may be glorified.”