

SEEKING CHRIST'S PEACE: ON CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Talk 13 (04/18/24)

[2711] **Entering into contemplative prayer is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we "gather up:" the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us. We let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed.**

This is the third in this sequence on contemplative prayer in the full catechism. Here we are drawn into the context of worship, which gives us a perspective on our lives and our prayer as children of God, the transcendent, the Holy, Almighty, and Merciful.

Growing in our participation in the Mass especially opens us to Christ leading us to growth in the catechism's three expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. The Mass is a source, school and springboard of all kinds of prayer for God's adopted children. (Cf. CCC #1073) The graces of the Mass bear fruit in this developing life of a persons prayer, a growing friendship of virtue between the Lord and us. It is a friendship of unequals, in that we can always grow to be more like him and we will always be less perfect than him.

The Good Shepherd gathers us and feeds us. Indeed, the risen Lord who has made his Paschal offering draws us to himself (cf. Jn 12:32) and into his worship. This requires of us a faith-formed mindfulness of him, and of ourselves in relation to him. And this awareness can become increasingly simple and mindfully habitual, an interior 'gathering' of ourselves. (Cf. Vatican II, SC n.7; CCC #1088)

Eucharistic participation, so as to personally meet Christ, for most of us is usually *first* in coming for his body and blood, and then *later* to being consciously drawn into his worship, his offering. The climax of this worship is when the priest says, "**Through him, with him, in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours forever and ever.**"

The Mass is Christ offering himself *and us*, and we are called into the majesty and mystery of His Paschal worship. In him, on the cross and now in glory, is the deepest filial and fraternal *caritas/agape/love*, meant to bear fruit in most profound expressions of the infused virtues of faith, hope, and humility, in our depths. Our **Amen** can and should progressively deepen in meaning, from a focus on him alone, to him embracing us, to our responding with the greatest generosity of our hearts, and back to him as we are united with him. This is accomplished through the deepest graces of cooperation: the receiving of the gifts of God as we become a grateful gift to God, our Father, in Christ. We offer the totality of our exterior and interior lives, through him, with him, and in him. The fire of our oblation, like Christ's, is the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Heb 9:14).

We enter into this holy and saving action as God's people by baptism, rooted in the sanctifying graces of that sacrament, with their infused virtues. We are, in Christ, adopted children of God. We are on the path of our baptismal promises, which have called us to follow Jesus into his Paschal mystery of love.

His light draws us to recognize our high calling and our radical need for assistance to fulfill it. And so we come to be purified and transformed and offered. We come with hearts open to his touch and shaping, trusting in his love and power.

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (n.7) from Vatican II, our minds are directed to see Christ not only in the Eucharistic species and in the offering in the priestly action, at the Mass, but also speaking from the heart of the Holy Scriptures in the liturgy of the word, and being present amidst the faithful joined together in prayer and song. Indeed he is the primary minister of every sacrament. And, we might add, that it is his grace, the grace of the risen Good Shepherd, that gathers us together for the celebration of every liturgy.

This rich and mysterious sacramental encounter with the Lord prepares us by way of total offering for our turning to Christ in the path of contemplative prayer. In the *caritas* of contemplative prayer, we offer our hearts into Christ's perfecting friendship, and worship. Participating in the Mass and contemplative prayer complement and enhance each other.

In our Holy Communion, the risen Jesus tells us repeatedly that he comes from beyond us, to live in us, joining us to himself. The sacrament deepens his indwelling, by helping us to recognize that he is meant to live inside of us, by us being drawn away from sin and into discipleship, i.e., into his virtues, and by our growing offering of ourselves into his friendship, in a kind of mutual indwelling, like the vine and the branches.

To live each day as though one is ready to meet, receive, and join Christ in the Mass, even though one might not be able to attend Mass daily, is surely a sound path for one's contemplative life.

All of this flows from God's great love for us in Christ, a love from eternity to eternity. (There is more to come on this dynamic of Eucharistic worship, in the next talk!)