

**PAX - WITH THE GOSPEL FOR OUR GUIDE
EASTER and EASTERTIDE, 2024**

SECTION ONE: Reading and Reflection

Theme: Contemplative Prayer

On the Oblate retreat (9 and 10 March), there was a consensus that it would be helpful to do this theme again, because a lot of oblates are new to the community and would not have had the benefit of it last time I presented it.

First of all, I don't think there is such a thing as "contemplative Prayer". There are contemplative people who pray. One can't say: "Now, I'll do contemplative prayer. Later, I'll pray Vespers." The word "contemplative" is one of the most misunderstood words in spiritual language. It is freely used, and most of us have a vague idea of it being associated with meditation, visions, religious experiences, nuns and monks, people who float through life rather than live in the real world.

What is the definition of a contemplative person?

To find the authentic answer, we need to analyze the word, "contemplative".

'con' means 'with'

tem is the Latin root of time, season, occasion or condition.

plative comes from the Greek word 'platos', and means breadth, breadth of vision, enlarged heart.

All-embracing widened heart expanded disposition.

Ephesians 3:18 contains the word 'breadth'. "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

2 Corinthians 6:11-13: "We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians: our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affection, but only in yours. In return – I speak as if I were speaking to children – 'Open wide your hearts.'"

In the Latin Dictionary I have used since my school days 60 years ago, some of the meanings of contemplative, as in a contemplative person, are to behold, (one who beholds), to gaze at, to observe attentively.

Who then, is a contemplative? One who lives with the disposition (condition) of breadth of vision, widened heart – a widened heart that embraces humanity. A contemplative person understands that in the face of every human being is the face of Christ. What right then do I have, to ignore Christ in that person? If I ignore that person, then I have not widened my heart to welcome another of Christ's people (brothers, sisters, children). And I believe that a contemplative person is immersed in the great creative act of a God of Love. The heart of a contemplative person beats in time with the heart of God. And I imagine that the heart of God does not discriminate!

The contemplative is part of a whole, a whole shot through with the action of God. (Sr. Joan Chittister). The contemplative is possessed with peace, because the vision of the contemplative is wholistic – every immediate human situation, every cosmic situation is seen from the perspective of God.

"To be a contemplative we must open our hearts and our doors to the stranger in whom lives the Word that is calling to our bounded hearts to become wider than denominationalism alone can ever make us. (Sr. Joan Chittister, *Illuminated Life – Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*).

Thomas Merton put two words together as the title of a Book in 1961: "Seeds of Contemplation". It was a remake of an earlier work. Later, in 1971, came Merton's classic, "Contemplation in a World of

Action". This is where we are situated. Without the first, we won't make much of the second. Without the foundation of preference for Christ, we will fall apart. Without preferring the love of Christ, we will end up preferring all the emptiness which the world has to offer. Thomas Merton taught: "The contemplative enters into God in order to be created." Thomas Merton, in his "Seeds of Contemplation" sums up the nature of a 'contemplative'.

Making it personal, it reads: "Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name."

This is the flame upon the earth...the presence of a contemplative', one immersed in a God of Love, and one who walks within "the fire of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire."

*"Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,
Cast flame upon the earth; raise up contemplatives among us,
Those who walk within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land.*

~ Australian Religious Poet, James McAuley, "A Letter to John Dryden".

SECTION TWO: Further Reading and Reflection

From "Contemplation in a World of Action" by Thomas Merton:

Those who attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening their own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. They will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of their own obsessions, aggressiveness, and ego-centred ambitions..."

Can we hear St. Benedict saying: Do not aspire to be called holy before you really are holy. And maybe he would say: Do not aspire to be called a contemplative before you really are a contemplative.

Other books by Merton:

- 'A Way to God'. Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey, by Matthew Fox.
- 'Seeds of Contemplation' and 'New Seeds of Contemplation'.
- 'Thoughts in Solitude'.
- 'Contemplative Prayer' (valuable guidance for prayer).
- 'The Wisdom of the Desert'.

SECTION THREE: About the Rule of St. Benedict.

The only reference to Easter in the Rule of Benedict, is that it is "holy" (sanctum), and a "time" we long for. Is this so, because "the resurrection of Jesus is the first day of the New Creation"? And it is also the central mystery of our faith. Fr. Keating brings to our attention the cosmic context: "The first resurrection scene is cast in a cosmic context. From a scriptural point of view, the garden in which the tomb of Jesus was situated reminds us of the Garden of Eden. The two gardens are juxtaposed: in the first, the human family, in the persons of Adam and Eve, lost God's intimacy and friendship; in the second, Mary Magdalene (out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils) appears as the first recipient of the good news that intimacy and union with God are once again available. "The Mystery of Christ, the Liturgy as Spiritual Experience", by Thomas Keating. (Element Books Ltd., Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset, U.K. 1991). Page 71.

Thomas Keating has been described as “the leader within the Catholic world in the task of recovering our Christian **contemplative** heritage.” (Ewert H. Cousins, General Editor, *World Spirituality, An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*). Thomas Keating founded “Contemplative Outreach”, a national program of formation and support in contemplative living.

There are indirect references to Easter throughout the Rule of Benedict, but the one in Chapter 49 is the most important.

SECTION FOUR: Community History

In an Autograph Book which I found in the Archives recently, there was this entry: My life may touch a million lives in some way, ere I go that this dear world of struggle, to the land I soon shall know: So this the wish I always wish, the prayer I always pray: “Let my life help the other lives it touches by the way.” The entry dates from 2/9/1932. Sr. Mary Stanislaus had painted a spray of roses inside, with a quote from “The Merchant of Venice”.

And on another page: “We don’t know why or how it’s true,
That giving can bring joy to you.
But this is something we have learned
That love bestowed is love returned.

SECTION FIVE: Liturgy

We are now in Eastertide. The Octave of Easter ends with the Liturgy of *Compline* (Night Prayer), on the Second Sunday of Easter - but strictly speaking, each Sunday in Eastertide is considered in terms of ‘solemnity’ in the Church, and in monastic communities. From Easter Sunday, March 31, until the Second Sunday of Easter, April 7, no Feast or *Memorial* is celebrated because of this SOLEMN week of Liturgy. The Liturgical Calendar for the rest of Eastertide is printed here for your reference.

April 8: The Annunciation of the Lord. (Transferred from Holy Week).

April 11: St. Stanislaus (Memorial)

April 14: Third Sunday of Easter

April 21: Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25: Anzac Day.

April 26: St. Mark the Evangelist (Feast).

April 28: Fifth Sunday of Easter. (St. Peter Chanel, first martyr of Oceania, is not celebrated this year.

April 29: St. Catherine of Siena (Memorial)

May 02: St. Athanasius.

May 03: Sts. Philip and James (Feast)

May 05: Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 12: The Ascension of the Lord.

May 13: A day to honour Blessed Julian of Norwich

May 14: St. Matthias (Feast)

May 19: Pentecost Sunday

May 24: Our Lady Help of Christians

May 25: St. Bede of England

May 26: Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

May 31: The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This is the end of the Easter edition of “Pax, with the Gospel for your Guide”. The next edition will be Post-Pentecost 1, and will cover three months: June, July and August.

SECTION SIX: Your Community

Oblate Hilary Scarce took Holy Communion to Sr. Elizabeth earlier this year, when she and her friends were staying here at the Abbey. Hilary is a Pastoral Care person at Emmaus Nursing Home in Brisbane.

We had a wonderful Oblate Retreat Weekend on 9 & 10 March. There was a lot of very honest sharing, and I know that many of us were helped by that.

Prayers please for Sr. Therese and Sr. Ancilla. Sr. Therese has sepsis and is very weak.

Sr. Ancilla was found to have gall bladder cancer. As this edition of Pax goes to the printer, she is undergoing extensive tests, and the results of these tests will determine the right course for her.

Happy Feast Day to:

April 21: Tony Anselm Tarleton, Alfred Anselm Breznik, Robert Anselm van Oort, and Kate Anselm Trevenen,

April 29: Claire Catherine Devlyn, Marie Catherine Gleeson, Kathleen Catherine Daysh, for St. Catherine of Siena

May 13: Patricia Julian Morgan, Brigid Julian Inder, Rev. Catherine Julian Eaton, Colleen Julian Hines, Therese Julian Proctor, Jean Julian Reid, Margaret Julian Crooks, Sr. Julian Barbara Garwood, Sandra Julian Cooper, Sr. Julian Grigor.

May 22: Laynie Rita Pullen

May 24: Amanda Mary Hickey

May 25: Heather Bede Thompson, Cheryl Bede Townsend, Antonio Bede Zaragoza, and Fr. Kevin Bede Walsh.

Brenda Joan Payne, and Brenda Joan Williams, for May 30th, St. Joan of Arc.

Josette Elizabeth Wickens, Sr. Elizabeth Funder, for May 31st, the Visitation of Our Lady to her cousin Elizabeth.

Happy Anniversary to:

April 16: Helen Seraphim Shorter.

April 19: Margaret Thomas More Whetham

April 19: Ewa Maria Teresa Komorowska

May 4: Abbess Hilda Scott, (Solemn Monastic Profession).

May 24: Ivan Benedict Fitz

May 25: Phyllis Magdalen Rodrigues, Clare Therese Sydenham, Rev. Jeanette Therese McHugh and Phillip John Wilson

May 24: Ivan Benedict Fitz

May 25: Phyllis Magdalen Rodrigues, Clare Therese Sydenham, Rev. Jeannette Therese McHugh, Phillip John Wilson

May 30: Wendy Godric Orrock.

Necrology

APRIL

03 – Sr. Mary Hildegard

07 – Sr. Mary Moica Hardy

10 – Sr. Mary Aelred Bradshaw

17 – Sr. Mary Editha Thompson (1983)

23 - Mother M. Ignatius Harnett (1915)

27 - Sr. M. Magdalene Parkinson (1900)

28 - Sr. M. Placida Burrows (1859)

MAY

- 1 - Sr. M. Veronica Brown (1992)
- 2 - Sr. M Dolores Haselden (1951)
- 4 - Sr. M. Angela Regan (1859)
- 17 - Most Rev. Charles Henry Davis.
- 29 - Sr. Mary Ann Hogan (1876)
- 31 - Sr. Mary Clare Bocher (1966)

SECTION SEVEN: Saints

St. Bede the Venerable, whose feast day is on May 25, is buried in the Galilee Chapel in Durham Cathedral, Durham, U.K. We have a significant number of Oblates who have taken the name "Bede".

SECTION EIGHT: For Reflection

From the Easter Vigil Liturgy:

May the Morning Star that never sets find this flame still burning: Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all humankind, Your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever, Amen.

Listening to the magnificent chant, one can understand why the Easter candle is not only lit at every baptism but will still be burning at one's funeral, the passage from death to life in Christ.

CHRIST OUR LIGHT. THANKS BE TO GOD.

PLEASE NOTE:

The Abbey is closed from April 28 – May 19 for the annual community holiday.