

Home Retreat: The Contemplative call to Nature 30.10.21

Welcome to this week's Home Retreat on the Contemplative call to Nature

Richard Rohr in recent weeks and months has had two weeks of reflection on the subject of Nature, and with COP26 having already started, I thought it might be appropriate to disseminate and share some of those reflections. Whatever we may think of Protest and Marches, and whether such things really get across the right messages, prayerful reflection on our Scriptures and careful observation of the state of our Planet could lead us to a new perspective, so as to live in harmony with our World.

Richard begins one set of reflections by saying, 'Nature itself is our first Bible, in things that are made. It begins by being Very Good.' Spirituality is about sinking back into the Source of everything. We are already there, but we have too little practice in seeing ourselves there. God, in Christ, is in all and through all and with all. We call this the Universal Christ or *another name for everything*. - in its fullness.

Our earth is participating in the mystery of redemption, liberation and salvation. The whole creation is groaning in one great act of giving birth. (Rm 8:22) Instead of seeing natural things as mere objects to be used, we need to allow nature to enchant us! Here is a basis for wonder and awe, which the child so readily displays, in normal circumstances, and to which we are urged by Jesus to return, in our appreciation of this Universe. Paradoxically, as we discover the intricacy, interconnectedness and variety of creation, through science, we have the opportunity to 'wonder' even more. I am sure St Benedict realised this as he wrote his Rule, asking his monks to appreciate everything they were given to use in the monastery, and treating everything, including the kitchen utensils, as they would treat the sacred vessels of the altar.

Richard has asked a variety of people to contribute to these reflections. The first, Howard Thurman, speaks of this awareness of the presence of God, while spending hours of silence and quiet in his rowboat, fishing. He was aware of the sky, the earth, the water and himself as one beat of the same pulse. Beyond that beat was the sense of presence which spoke to him. No voice, no image. But there was God. When we realise that the entire physical world around us, all of creation, is the **hiding place** and **the revelation of God**, then it becomes safe; home; enchanted; offering grace to any who **look deeply**.

Another contributor is Barbara Holmes, author of several books, one of which '*Race and Cosmos*' was the moment of her own transformation and awakening. She turned to science and cosmology to obtain a new view of the world, especially

from the physicists, who saw a universe permeated with movement and energy, which vibrates and pulses with access to many dimensions. We are all connected, not just spiritually or through our imagination, but **actually**, and the apparent order that is all around us makes us **think** that we are separate. Quantum physics, however, tells us that particles burst into existence in unpredictable ways. Our observations affect the observed. Dreams of order and rationality are not the building blocks of the universe. She sees **people** differently – as spiritual beings having a human experience, instead of bodily entities, without any spirit or soul.

A concept which is brought in here is an ancient metaphor: the Great Chain of Being. Richard argues that this was a very positive concept in its time, linking all beings to the Divine Creator, including angelic beings, human beings, animals, plants, water and Planet earth itself, with all the minerals. In themselves and in their union together, they **proclaim the glory of God**, (Ps 103), and the inherent dignity of all things. The Great Chain of Being was the first holistic metaphor for the new way of seeing offered by the Incarnation: Jesus as the living icon of integration. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* Each of us and everything else, is a reflecting mirror of that wholeness. Science has two words which try to describe the same phenomenon ‘Holons’ and ‘Fractals’. Do look them up!

A contemplative practice which Barbara Holmes speaks of, is **ocean fishing** with her husband. It is through this activity, in communion with waves and wind and ocean, that she has come to realise the importance of **simply Being**. She did many things in life, including getting several degrees and having 3-4 careers, but she declares at the end: *To just Be is such a blessing!*

Among the Potawatomi Nation, Robin Kimmerer elaborates on their culture in which they keep alive the knowledge that **we are all One**, woven in the same fabric of life and where people honour the reciprocity of the Universe through ritual and tradition. The **Ceremonial Giveaway** is an echo of their oldest teaching. Generosity is both a moral and material imperative among the people of his tribe, who live close to the land and know the waves of plenty and scarcity. Wealth is measured **in terms of having enough to give away**. Hoarding the gift, we become constipated with wealth, bloated with possessions and too heavy to join the dance... The tribe realised the nature of **the giveaway** by noticing the, especially of the berries. *Minidewak* is their word for the Giveaway, meaning **‘they give with the heart’**. The part *Min* means both ‘gift’ and ‘berry’, The berries are part of the ritual; the reciprocity of gift reminds the participants that the berries are gift to them, but the berries need the people to disperse their seeds and grow more

abundantly. Each depends on the other. The moral covenant of reciprocity calls us to honour our responsibilities for all we have been given, for all we have taken. It is now our turn, long overdue.

The core message of the Incarnation of God in Jesus is that the Divine Presence is here – not over there in some far off realm. Indigenous people and some of our scriptures, understand this. We are part of an **enormous ecosystem**, and human beings are **not** the centre of the universe. From the moment of the Big Bang, nature was revealing the glory and goodness of the Divine Presence ; it must be seen as a gratuitous gift. Jesus came to live **in its midst**, and enjoy life in all its natural variations and be our model and exemplar. Jesus is the gift that honours the gift, as it were. Once we become aware of this generous creative Presence, that exists in all things by their very nature, we can honour the Indwelling Spirit as the inner source of all dignity and worthiness. Dignity is not doled out to the supposedly ‘worthy’. It grounds the inherent worthiness of all things in their very nature and existence. The **true and authentic work of religion** is to help us recognise and recover the divine image in everything. It is to mirror things correctly, deeply and fully, until **all things** know who they are.

Christ told Lady Julian of Norwich, when he showed her something in her hand the size of a hazel nut “It is all that is created”. She then understood that ‘Everything that is, has its being through the love of God.’ Contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber puts it this way: Everything is a holon, a part that replicates the whole. ,

St Bonaventure suggested that to work up to **loving God**, we begin with the humblest and simplest things and then move up from there. ‘Let us begin at the bottom, presenting ourselves with the whole material world as a mirror, through which we may pass over to God, the Supreme Craftsman.’ Being fully present to the **soul of all things** allows us to say “This is good, this is enough. In fact that is all I need.” We are now situated in the One Loving Gaze that unites **all things in universal attraction and appreciation**.

Monastic tradition has its roots in a call to be in intimate connection with nature. The monk’s path was birthed in the forests and deserts, the places of wilderness and other wild edges that reflect an inner reality as well. This call to the edges, which is the monk’s call, is a call to wildness—to that which lies beyond our domesticated, neat, safe, and secure lives. Nature reminds us of the messiness and beauty of things. . . .

Our work as spiritual seekers and contemplatives is to see all of creation as woven together in holiness **and to live this truth**. In this loving act, we begin to knit together that which has been torn; we gather all that has been scattered.

Contemplative practice is a way to bring healing presence to the world. One of the fruits of contemplative practice is the **remembrance of our wholeness**; we are able to see beyond the divisions we create with our egos and minds, and to rediscover the truth that we are all of one creation.

There is so much more we could mention in this reflection. I have included some resource material to help you during the rest of the day. They include different perspectives on the same theme and I hope they stimulate your thought and action during this critical time for all of us. Thank you for listening and God bless you.