



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Weekly Teachings 20/5/2012



Contemplating Nature and Silent Prayer

Evagrius' ideas of approaching God, through scripture, nature and through pure prayer were a fundamental idea with the Desert Fathers and Mothers: 'One of the wise men of that time went to find the holy man Antony and asked him:

'Father, how can you be happy when you are deprived of the consolation books can give?' Antony replied: 'My philosopher friend, my book is the nature of creatures; and this book is always in front of me when I want to read the word of God.'

We find the same idea expressed in Celtic Christianity: 'Through the letters of Scripture and the species of creation the eternal light is revealed.' (John Scotus Eriugena 9thc). It is a human experience, not linked to time and place. Contemplation of nature helps us to leave our thoughts and images behind that would obscure the Divine Presence. I am sure that many of you reading these 'Letters' have had a similar experience of boundaries falling away, of a sense of interconnectedness, a sense of wonder and awe, a sense of 'more', when faced with the beauty of nature, the beauty of a sunset.

This same experience is also afforded by silent prayer, to which many ways of prayer lead. But for me especially meditation enables this to happen. The key in all is the leaving behind of thoughts and images, even of God: 'When you are praying do not fancy the Divinity like some image formed within yourself. Avoid also allowing your spirit to be impressed with the seal of some particular shape, but rather, free from all matter, draw near the immaterial Being and you will attain to understanding.' This gradual stripping away of all images and forms of self and of God will allow direct contact with formless Divine Reality.

Evagrius' two stages of the spiritual journey 'praxis' and 'theoria', prayer, purifying of the ego drives and contemplation go hand in hand. We are not talking about a linear process; it is not a question of first becoming whole before contemplation can take place. It is a process of sometimes overlapping and sometimes deepening levels of awareness. In fact, as we have

seen in other ?Letters? a sudden deep level of awareness, a ?metanoia?, a turning around, a new way of seeing reality, is in fact often the start of the journey. We must not assume that it is our effort alone that will bring us into the Presence, grace has an equally important role, as Evagrius underlines:

?The Holy Spirit takes compassion on our weakness, and though we are impure he often comes to visit us. If he should find our spirit praying to him out of love for the truth he then descends upon it and dispels the whole army of thoughts and reasoning that besets it. And he too urges it onto the works of spiritual prayer.?

We don?t have to be perfect at the start of our pilgrimage to our true Self and the indwelling Christ. All we need to do is faithfully persevere on our journey of prayer and be open to change. Let go of fear, so love can take its place.

Kim Nataraja

For further help with setting up and leading groups, please look at the [?Christian Meditation Groups? Website](#) in English, Spanish and French, based on the book [?A Pearl of Great Price?](#) by Laurence Freeman

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