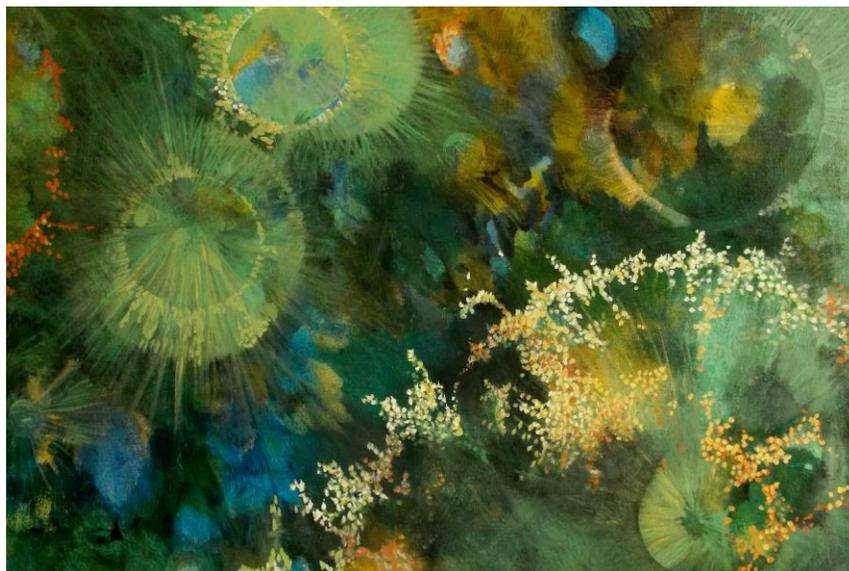




THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

97: Contemplative Service



Jana Siebers, *Seeds or Stars?*

*Now there are varieties of gifts,
but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of service,
but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of working,
but the same God who inspires them all in everyone.
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit
for the common good.*

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

A contemplative practice such as Centering Prayer seems to naturally call forth contemplative service. When we start this journey, we often are doing Centering Prayer to feel better, to be more centered, focused and relaxed, to experience spiritual consolations, to deepen our relationship with God. As our practice matures, our motivation changes. It moves beyond our felt experiences to something deeper.

What are you really doing when you sit down in Centering Prayer and open yourself to God's presence and action within? In *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, Fr. Thomas says, "You are opening to God's presence and consenting to God's activity. God's activity is the work of the Holy Spirit *in your particular embodiment* in this world."

In *Invitation to Love* Fr. Thomas says, "The contemplative journey, of its very nature, calls us forth to act in a fully human way under the inspiration of the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts provide the divine energy of grace..." As we have learned in this program and through our practice of Centering Prayer, "We are rooted in God, and by accessing that divine energy we are united with God and able to do what Jesus did: be a manifestation of God's tenderness and compassion among the people we serve and love (*Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*)." Rooted in God, accessing divine energy, we are able to do as Jesus asks of us in Matthew 10:8, *Give as gift what you have received as gift.*

What is contemplative service? It's not just volunteering and it's more than helping. And it's not about accomplishing something. When our service is motivated by the emotional programs of the energy centers and not from the true center of our oneness with the Indwelling Spirit and from a sense of oneness with all creation, we are likely to burn out. Contemplative service is a vocation, a divine call motivated and inspired by love. Service happens when what we do arises from our center, inspired and led by God. It's a way of life, a way of being present to all that surrounds us. Inspired by this divine call, we engage in contemplative service with the intention of being transformed in and through the experience.

"It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving."
- Mother Teresa

As you consent to the work of the Holy Spirit in your particular embodiment, the fruits of the Spirit manifest and are experienced by those in relationship with you.

...*The fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*
- Galatians 5:22-23

By their fruits you will know them.
- Matthew 7:16

A Meditation

"...The best way to prepare ourselves for the possible vocation of sharing contemplation with others is not to study how to talk and reason about contemplation but withdraw ourselves as much as we can from talk and argument and retire into the silence and humility of heart in which God will purify our love of all its human imperfections. Then in his own time he will set our hand to the work

he wants us to do, and we will find ourselves doing it without being quite able to realize how we got there, or how it all started."

- Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

"Daily life is practice number one for a Christian, but it can cease to be a practice without a discipline of Centering Prayer. The contemplative dimension of the Gospel perceives in daily life the treasures of holiness hidden in the most trivial and mundane events."

- Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

To Practice

- Reflect on what you have experienced from living this program. What touches your heart? Are you called to service in some way? What is next for you?

Resources for Further Study:

"Contemplative Service," a 40-day praxis from The Contemplative Life Program by Contemplative Outreach.

Notes and Reflections: