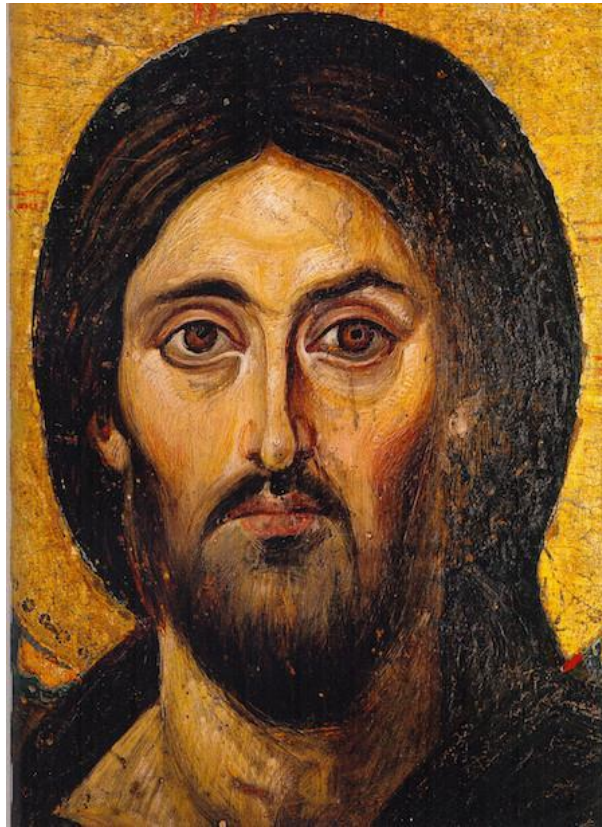




THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

66: The Spiritual Senses, Part 1 (cont.)



Detail of Christ Pantocrator icon, oldest known surviving example of the icon of Christ, 6th or 7th century CE

*Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
when you shepherd,
where you give rest at midday.
Why should I be like one wandering
after the flocks of your companions?*

*If you do not know,
most beautiful among women,
follow the tracks of the flock
and pasture your lambs
near the shepherd's tents.*

- Song of Songs 1:7-8

"You know how it is when you're in the presence of a fascinating person. They're chatting away and all of a sudden, there's a blurring process that takes place, and you don't hear what they're saying anymore because you've moved beyond listening with the ears, to a kind of heart listening, or attentiveness, or what might be called 'spiritual attentiveness.' You're listening to the body person rather than the words, which are only one part of the person.

"Mary [of Bethany] exemplifies in the Gospel, this process of interiorization of the Word of God which goes beyond the words to the person who is speaking to us and enters into union with that person. The Word, then, is assimilated at ever deepening levels of attentiveness. And when we are alert to the Person of God, speaking to us through the text and the self-disclosures therein, then one has reached a point of spiritual attentiveness, alertness, awakens.

"Contemplative prayer which is designed to use a sacred symbol as the starting point, is the diving board, you might say, into the spiritual level of our being and to awaken our alertness, our attentiveness on the level of person-to-person, being-to-being conversation, which might better be called communion...an interaction, or a relationship that is more intimate than simply conversation, because communion involves the whole person and relating to the total-body person, rather than just their voice or what they are saying. So the voice, or what they're saying, is simply the introduction into who they are. And in the case of Jesus, he is the Divine Presence in human form, and this is what he's trying to give us, not just the meaning of words or of symbols of the mystery.

"And so, spiritual attentiveness, then, is the fruit of the practice of listening to the Word of God, of looking lovingly upon God, icon, or at the tabernacle, or at the Eucharist exposed on the altar, or in breathing, following one's own breath as a symbol of opening, receiving, and surrendering to the Spirit. And at that point, then, one becomes aware of the undifferentiated presence of God beyond thinking, feeling and particular acts. And this is where every method of contemplative practice is designed to bring us."

-Thomas Keating, from the Session 65 video

Meditations

"For now, if you wish to keep growing...nourish your heart... 'But' you ask, 'how am I to go on; what am I to do next?'... This is what you are to do: lift your heart up to the Lord, with a gentle stirring of love desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts. Center all your attention and desire on him and let this be the sole concern of your mind and heart... Diligently persevere... In the beginning it is usual to feel nothing [in] a *cloud of unknowing*... If you strive to fix your love on God...which is the work of contemplation I have urged you to begin, I am confident that God in his goodness will bring you to a deep experience of himself."

-*The Cloud of Unknowing*, edited by William Johnston

"It is not a tête-à-tête or a corps-à-corps that we need; it is a heart-to-heart...such as can only be realized in a universal, mutual love."

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*

To Practice

- Reflect upon the practice of the listening heart. You may wish to incorporate this intention in your Centering Prayer practice.

Resources for Further Study:

You may wish to read Chapters 1 and 2 in *The Better Part*, and Chapter 9 from *Reawakenings*, both by Thomas Keating.

Notes and Reflections: