



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 77: Review of Part 4



*“It is precisely because we resist the darkness in ourselves that we miss the depths of the loveliness, beauty, brilliance, creativity, and joy that lie at our core.”*

*Thomas Moore*

Thomas Moore, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

The Divine Therapy as we have explored it in Part 4, illuminates the Christian model of growth and transformation starting with the Dark Night of the Soul, the work of Saint John of the Cross. There are two aspects to the Dark Night. The night of sense brings about the dismantling of the emotional programs. The night of spirit is a more intimate purification where all "felt" experiences of God disappear, but we enter a process of liberation from the false-self system. As the dark nights deepen, Gerald May says, "We are freed to join the dance of life in fullness without having a clue about what the steps are." Consenting to God's action in the dark nights leads us towards transforming union where we enter the cloud of unknowing.

We looked at the beatitudes as another way to explore the Christian path alongside the models of the human condition. The beatitudes came out of the heart of Jesus when he realized that the multitudes who were following him were like sheep without a shepherd, which describes how many of us feel at times in this school of life. They are affirmations that summarize Jesus' teaching about the true meaning of happiness. Fr. Thomas says, "...The beatitudes are all directed to one project – inner freedom: freeing us from the fascination of programs for happiness that are doomed to failure; freeing us from an over-dependency on unquestioning values, what might be called pre-packaged values, preconceived ideas."

As our spiritual growth and development matures, we start to experience the fruits and gifts of the Spirit – the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety, reverence. Fr. Thomas calls the beatitudes the ripe fruits of the gifts of the Spirit. They encourage us to participate in our life and healing, in the dismantling of our emotional programs. He cautions us to not "give too passive a meaning to some of these wisdom sayings of Jesus in which he urges us to accept what is. He always wants us to be ready to do something about the situation once we've accepted it."

The story of Mary and Martha illustrates the back and forth of daily life and contemplative practice. The anxiety and worry set off in daily life by the emotional programs can be balanced by the "better part" that Mary has chosen, which is the awakening of spiritual attentiveness, where she moved beyond listening with the ears to a kind of heart listening. Fr. Thomas says, "The gentle activity of consenting to God during the time of contemplative prayer sustains spiritual attentiveness and distinguishes it from mere emptiness of mind. It is rather, the emptiness of self. The divine presence fills that emptiness and transforms our motivation into that of the Spirit."

Once spiritual attentiveness is awakened, we become more attuned to the Spirit in all of life. Our whole being experiences God no longer as an attraction, but as a Presence, and becomes rooted in God. We see God in everything and everything in God. As our faith matures and we more and more experience the pure love of God, our contemplative practice and experiences lead us into action. We are able to feel the suffering of others, we take responsibility for being part of the human family, and we look for ways to contribute – to those right in front of us in our own family and among the people in our daily lives.

Fr. Thomas reminds us that "you have the destiny to be transformed and the capacity to transmit your personal transformation, that is, your absorption of the divine mystery, your assimilation into the Word of God, into daily life among the people you know and with whom you live."

## **A Meditation**

*This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.*

- John 15:12

To love as Jesus loved us is to love with Divine Love, with the Love of the persons of the Trinity which is total self-surrender. They love not in order to receive love in return, but because it is the nature of divine love to give, to pour itself out, to surrender, and to do so for no other reason than because it is what it is – sheer gift. We too must love not in order to become something, but because we are called to be stewards of divine love; to be identified with it and to be channels for this immense energy, till the world is transformed by Christ and he is all in all. We surrender not because we choose to, but because Jesus has chosen us and commanded us to love as he has loved us.

- Thomas Keating, *Awakenings*

### **To Practice**

- Take some time to rest, catch-up or review any videos you wish to revisit.

- Spend some time resting in the teaching summarized above – the dark nights, the beatitudes, the fruits and gifts of the Spirit, spiritual attentiveness, the pure love of God, the experience of unity with all of life. We are called to be stewards of divine love; to be identified with it and to be channels for this immense energy: What would this look like for you?

### **Notes and Reflections:**