



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

“A Word About Service”
Excerpted from
God Is Love: The Heart of All Creation

Fr. Thomas Keating

Our own spiritual life has to be a combination of this capacity for solitude with God and communion and service of others. Service is considered the best practice to further the interior life because it's closest to the idea of alert receptivity and passivity that is not just emptiness but openness to the inspirations of the Spirit. So, it's an active doing nothing.

And this has to be expressed especially in servant leadership and, I think for a while, the church of the middle ages lost that vision of Christ as servant leader in the sense that it joined forces with political powers. Maybe that was historically inevitable because there was no other kind of force to establish a fairly safe society for people but when any group affirms its elite-ness or its difference from the rest of the group, there's a hazard for the ego to take possession of that idea and go for it because now it has a kind of excuse or motive for justifying outrageous activities.

And we see that Jesus emphasized servant leadership to his apostles over and over again. A real leader is the one who is the servant of all. So, servant leadership, again, is an expression of our realization that everyone else is not only equal but probably better than us. And that whatever we do for others is not to fix them which presumes that we know how to fix or even to help them which indicates we're in a superior position; but is a privilege of serving them in gratitude as members of this body that is being transformed into God and in which God dwells.

And this is what Jesus said, “In serving the needy, the person you really are serving is me.” So, he doesn't need our leadership. But he does need our service that manifests the divine humility in taking the lowest place or in moving out of all the infinite privileges of belonging to the essence of the divine nature. Now, if that was really interiorized, then helping other people would change into serving other people, and fixing situations would change into serving other people, or allowing the universe of God to heal the situations that are impossible for humans to deal with.

So, this is what servant leadership is that we teach so vigorously in Contemplative Outreach. And it's the prayer that enables us to see the equality or to see that we're sharing an experience that is much greater than any kind of particular problem that might arise. So, when we get up from the Centering Prayer seat, we're not about to fix anybody, including ourselves because that would be a judgment

that they need fixing and that we're the right person to fix it. So, there is a certain presumption there that really is not real.

But by making oneself a servant of everyone, then the divine healing or the redemptive work of Christ can flow through us without our getting in the way. And so, servant leadership leads to gratitude, whereas just helping or fixing others presupposes a superiority in some degree that may create frustration in our neighbors.

The most beautiful thing about the spiritual journey is that we're being gradually conformed to Christ crucified which means Christ in his humanity and ours in our humanity is being invited to surrender, turn itself over completely to God out of love and in the full consciousness that this is a service that's being offered to God for the whole human race, not just ourselves or our particular friends or companions or enemies for that reason.

The heart and the spiritual journey have to become big enough to take in everybody in whoever lived past, present, and to come because they are loved by God to the point of trying to save them by completely identifying with the human condition and sin and doing that involves identification with the consequences of sin and one of those is suffering endured out of love for the healing of the unhealthy members of the Christian family and the Mystical Body of Christ.