

Contemplative Prayer – Jill Howard-Gunasekera

In my book 'Common Prayer – A liturgy for Ordinary Radicals' they have a theme for each month of the year. September's is contemplative prayer and I enjoyed reading it and will try to find ways to have more contemplative prayer in my life.

At the moment Kit and I are doing a 30 day retreat (at home via Youtube) with a Jesuit priest in New Orleans USA! (not personally) but we are following his 'Ascent with Ignatius'. As usual these lovely gifts come to us via friends and my friend Rachel introduced this to us, as she'd been introduced to it by a friend. It's great when we can pass on gifts of all kinds whether they be an actual physical gift or a thought gift. It's great to learn from each other.

If you'd like to do the 30 day retreat (they are youtube videos between 5-20 minutes each day for 30 days) you can find the link here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riU6QDPbifc&list=PLSWflyU3UHB4knrdUQwhpmZ-XnVHQMhX>

Contemplative Prayer (taken from Common Prayer – A liturgy for Ordinary Radicals)

Over and over, Scripture invites us to abide in God. To rest in God. To dwell in God. More than fifty times, Paul repeats this phrase "in Christ." Contemplative prayer is not just about activity and speaking but also about listening and resting in God. Many of us have grown up thinking of prayer as a checklist of requests to God, like giving a grocery list to someone headed to the supermarket. As one kid said, "I'm heading off to pray; does anyone need anything?" Prayer is certainly about sharing our concerns and frustrations with God. God is personal enough to come down and wrestle in the dirt with Jacob or answer Abraham's pleading on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. Still, contemplative prayer goes deeper. A primary purpose of prayer is to impress on us the personality and character of Christ. We want to become like Jesus, so the life that we live is no longer ours but Christ living in us and through us.

Prayer is less about trying to get God to do something we want God to do and more about getting ourselves to do what God wants us to do and to become who God wants us to become. There are times when we speak, weep, groan, and shout at God. But there are also times when we simply sit in silence and are held by our Beloved. We remember the character of God, the fruit of the Spirit, and the incarnation of Jesus as he reveals to us what God is like with flesh on. And we pray that God's character will become our character. The monks have been known to say, "If your speaking doesn't add something beautiful to the silence, don't speak. "For

many of us in the high-paced, cluttered world of materialism and noise, silence is a way we can free up the space to listen to God.

Silence gets interrupted pretty quickly. Whether it's a knock at the door, a cry from the nursery, or thoughts in our own heads, something almost always breaks the silence we long for in contemplative prayer. It is tempting to give up, to say that silence is not possible in our context or "I'm not cut out for this." But the wisdom of those who've gone before is helpful here. Teresa of Avila, who was distracted by her own thoughts in prayer, said she learned not to fight them but to let them come and go like waves in the sea., trusting that God was an anchor who could hold her through any storm.

Contemplation is about tending to the lines that anchor us in Christ. For Francis of Assisi, the San Damiano cross was one of those lines, serving as an icon to focus his prayer on Christ's love. It was after hours of prayer before this cross that he heard Jesus say, "Rebuild my church, which is in ruins." Then he got up to start the most radical renewal movement of the Middle ages. Activism that matters to the kingdom is always rooted in prayer. If we want to join God in changing the world, the place to begin is on our knees before the cross.