

## **INSCAPE January 2014**

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**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!**

### **HE PITCHED HIS TENT AMONG US**

Karl Rahner (+1984), a Roman Catholic theologian, once wrote that the Christian of the future would have to be a mystic or he/she would be nothing at all. The future Christian would have to experience *Someone* or he/she would hardly be able to be counted as a vibrant Christian in a post-Christian age.

Jesus Christ came among us, God in human form, to convince us, especially in His death on the cross, how madly in love His Heavenly Father is with His children. Christ died, but rose from the dead and was empowered by His father to release His Spirit of love into our hearts (Romans 5:5). Through the infusion of the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope and love, you and I are able to experience the personalized love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This Triune Community of Love lives within us through Baptism. It is operating at all times around us, with God's uncreated energies of love in each created atom and sub-atomic particle, in each event of life.

Yet, how little of God we manage to "see" or contemplate within us and around us. What gives our lives greatest happiness and joy and meaning is to live in love, giving and receiving love from God and neighbor. These are the two great commandments of God.

Contemplation, the art of experiencing God through the infusion of the Spirit's gifts of faith, hope and love, should be our ordinary state of living, both on this earth and in the Heavenly Kingdom. "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, that Thou art the only true God, even the One Who sent Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). We cannot truly know, love or contemplate God without also knowing, loving and contemplating God in each other. "No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us...." (1John 4:12).

Inscape Newsletters are written on various topics to help the pilgrim-Christian progress through contemplative prayer that is very much like a journey through a desert. It is hoped that the contents of these newsletters, when prayerfully pondered, will be as manna come down from Heaven to strengthen you in your spiritual growth in contemplative prayer.

The journey into contemplative prayer can never be merely a linear movement from one clearly marked point to another and so on to the finish line. It is a growth in love, and love is never a linear movement.

We read in the Old Testament that the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years. They moved in circles of light, shadow and darkness. They resisted and disobeyed God. They built false idols or wanted to regress to more safe places. They learned how to find God by petitional prayer. They knew how to receive God's comforting love as they accepted their brokenness and sinfulness. They learned adoration and worship in the silence of the desert of their hearts. They were purified of self-seeking and learned to live in the essence of contemplative prayer that is total abandonment to God's will. They were sustained on their journey with manna from Yahweh.

Jesus is the manna we receive for today's journey, his risen Presence allows us to receive His indwelling presence with His Holy Spirit as the true Heavenly Manna, the Living Bread of Life, that brings us eternal life that will never perish.

The Liturgical Feast of the Nativity, December 25<sup>th</sup> (New Revised Calendar) or January 7<sup>th</sup> (Julian Calendar), celebrates God's infinite emptying of Himself in the Incarnation of His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:10) and our infinite enrichment in that love to become participators in His very own Divine Nature (2 Peter 1:4). God gives us His perfect gift, His Son, not only as a present, but according to the root meaning of the word, present, as His everlasting, intimate *presence* among us. God's mystery of Divine Love is that He desires to give Himself to us human beings in an immanent, indwelling presence. His presence is built upon the elements of true, intimate presence: total *availability*, *mutuality* of two becoming one in a union of love that results in a continued *interchange* of God's Triune Community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as gift of Self-Sacrifice to us.

## THE GOOD NEWS

The Good News of Christianity is God's revelation that God calls us to intimacy. We can live for and with other human persons. But God's infinite goodness and love call us to share His happiness by living in Him. God's awesome transcendence, Christianity teaches, paradoxically makes Him *immanently* present within us in an incomprehensible but total way of self-giving to us.

God's uncreated energies of love penetrate every part of our being. They invade us most intimately so that in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). God, as a Triune Community of Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, lives within us in our deepest consciousness level that Sacred Scripture calls our *heart*. But the Good News is that God so loves us that we can, through His incarnated Word, Jesus Christ, become totally transformed into Him.

## GOD IS AMONG US

The Incarnation makes it possible for God in His Word (Logos) to "pitch His tent" and dwell among us. The Good News coming from the birth of Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, is that this All-Loving God is not far from us. Although there will always remain something unapproachable, unpossessable and unfathomable about God, the Trinity, yet Jesus Christ's role in His Incarnation, death, and resurrection is to pour the love of God into our hearts (Romans 5:5). He has given His Spirit to us so that we can "know" and experience God as a Community of Loving Persons Who exist within this mystery in "Total Freedom".

This reality is the end of the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He came among us to make it possible, not only that we might become children of God but that at all times we might live in that continued awareness discovered in each moment of our lives. This is your dignity: to be called children of God and you really are such... "See how abundant the love of the Father is toward us, for He has called us sons and made us; therefore the world does not know us because it did not know Him" (1John 3:1)...in the process of discovering and surrendering to the uncreated energies of God living within you and within the context of each human situation or event. God is saying in substance to you in each moment: "Here I AM; experience my love. This place is holy. Take off your shoes, your securities, and approach this burning bush to become consumed by the Fire of My Divine Love for you."

## CONTEMPLATIVE KNOWLEDGE

This highest union, the infused union of the Trinity, in which God communicates Himself as Father, Son and Spirit, is not achieved by any conceptual knowledge but through an immediate, experiential knowledge wherein He opens Himself to you.

You can never come to this knowledge through your own concepts or thinking process. God, purely and simply, in His transcendence, reveals Himself to you when He wishes and as He wishes. It is not so much that God does something new and different to you after years of your own preparation and cooperation through continued purification of your heart from self-centeredness. He is always present, the same loving Father, Son and Spirit, loving you with an infinite, uncreated love.

But when you have cracked open the door of your heart and you finally open it, you stand before what was always there. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). In a state of humility you break yourself of your own "so called" power to possess your life, to take love and to control both God and others. Then you enter into the reality that was always there. With Moses we have to climb up the mountain to reach God by a knowing that is an unknowing, a darkness that is truly luminous. As you separate yourself from all limitations you place on God and from all attachments to your own self-love, you reach the top of the mountain.

There in the darkness of the storming clouds you hear the notes of the trumpet and you see those lights that no human method could ever give you. No human mind, no guru, no technique could ever bring you God's personalized gift of Himself. God has to take over the communication of Himself to you directly. No one but God can give Himself to you. God so loves you as to give you His Son so that in believing in Him you might live forever (John 3:16). His Son is sheer gift, but the good news is that the gift is God Himself.

This is the awesome mystery of the good news: that we can experience God sharing with us His very own Being and Divinizing us into His own children. "See how abundant the love of the Father is toward us, for He has called us sons and made us; therefore the world does not know us because it did not know Him. My beloved, now we are the sons of God, and as yet it has not been revealed what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be in His likeness; for we shall see Him as He is" (1John 3: 1-2).

### **LIVING IN GOD'S PRESENCE**

For true Christians who are moving into true contemplation of the key mysteries of their faith, the birth of Christ is every day, is happening at this very moment. God's love in Christ Jesus through His Spirit is being incarnated in this concrete moment in your living situation. Contemplation is the God-given gift through the Spirit's infusion of faith, hope and love that you might enter into the *kairos*, the moment of salvation of God's healing love for you. It is not only to remember (anamnesis) the historical moment of what happened in a cave near Bethlehem centuries ago as Mary (the one in whom perfect Divine Nature is united with perfect human nature) gave birth to her Son, her Creator and God-of-All, but it is to experience the birth of Christ, of God-Man, now happening in your place in history but also happening in God's eternal *now* moment.

Your goal in life is to convert your life at every moment into a loving response, as you continually experience in deepening consciousness the infinite love of God for you. In the birthing of Christ in your heart, God's choicest and most perfect gift of loving presence is given to you. Your response is to live at each moment in an exchange of a loving gift of yourself to God. You are being birthed also into your true being in Christ as you exchange the gift of yourself by becoming a loving presence to Him in this moment that leads you into the next moment.

You want to move your will so that at each moment you wish to surrender yourself in total gift back to God. This can be done only to the degree that you experience God's great love for you in this moment. God is completely and totally present to you in His self-giving. God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, cannot be more present or more self-giving than He is to you in this moment. The question is: How can you be more present to Him? How can you become total gift to God?

To give, not things, but ultimately oneself, is the essence of love. Love lavishes goods, gives all without reserve if the love that you receive is consciously experienced from God as a similar love without reserve. Love begets the same kind of love experienced. How can you continue ever more to experience this infinite love? How can you hold yourself in the state of oneness, your will attached solely at all times to the will of God? This is God's gift through His Spirit of Christ. It comes through infused faith, hope and love.

Yet you can cooperate to dispose yourself for this increased gift of awareness of God's intimate, loving presence in each moment. No one but yourself can raise your mind and heart toward God and gift God with the free gift of yourself. But this gifting of yourself to God takes place in the context of your every moment, in the deeds, words and thoughts that you permeate with your self-giving love to God. God desires the only gift...that He cannot have... unless you give it to Him. That would be the gift of your authentic, unique and personal love for Him!

### **ALONENESS WITH THE ALONE**

Many Christians would like to live each moment contemplating God's presence as love and surrendering themselves in love back to God. But how few Christians are ready to be alone with the Alone before they seek to find God in the *many*...the mystery of *Otherness*? Jesus teaches us to go out as He did to preach and to be a healing love to the broken ones of our world. But He also shows us that before He went out among people as the Divine Physician, He had continued need to go aside and to be alone with His Heavenly Father in experienced exchange of gifts of each other. We read in the Gospel proclamation: "But He departed into the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:16). Our Lord Jesus Christ also reminds us to come aside and rest awhile...to be alone, with our Heavenly Father in prayerful listening and presence.

At times this was to go out into a deserted place; at other times it was to go up the mountain to find His aloneness with the Alone. In such moments of "birthing" in which He was becoming His true self in the Father's love through the Spirit poured into His heart, Jesus emptied Himself as total gift to the Father. His giving in loving service to other human beings who came into His daily life, was in proportion to the experienced love the Father revealed He had for His Son.

Husbands and wives need aloneness with each other to give them an awareness of their beauty through the exchange of the gift of each other. You and I have continued need for times to be alone with God, our Bridegroom, as Jesus so often revealed to us on the pages of the New Testament. The being alone with God in "aloneness" prayer, should never be an occasion to separate yourself from your love and service to others. Certainly it should never be a source of feeding one's false ego in self-seeking, rather than in true *kenotic* living for God in self-surrendering Christmas love.

### **IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT**

It was in the still of the night that angels announced the Birth of the Christ to poor, humble shepherds who were watching their flock near Bethlehem. It is in the silence within our hearts that Jesus is birthed into new life. He truly abides with His Father and His Spirit within our deeper consciousness. God gives Himself (today and in every moment) to us directly, beyond all concepts, images and even feelings. In the depths of our beings, our hearts are the birthing stable where the Christ Child is again born on this earth. God gives us Himself in the silence of

His begetting His Word through the fiery gaze of the Spirit of Love. To give your true-life and true-love away as a total gift to another, you must first be in total possession of it! You cannot give away that which you do not already have!

But what a struggle most of us undergo to become silent before God's silent love. It means first of all that we discipline ourselves to meet our living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in an aloneness that admits of a physical silence. We are taken away from the multiplicity of activities and noises around us, to return to that primal silence in which God is always speaking to all creation in His Word. Do you have a time each day when you can be alone with God? True Christian contemplation, the finding of God in ALL things, cannot happen unless you can find God dwelling within the core of your very being, in your heart.

It is in such physical silence that a greater surrender of yourself to God's movements in prayer can unfold on higher levels of psychic and spiritual silence. As you relax in the physical silence both around you and within your body, you breathe more deeply, more peacefully. You begin to go down with greater ease into your inner self and joyfully stretch out your spiritual hands. You grasp God who now is so close to you in your consciousness through surrender of yourself to God's movements in faith, hope and love. In such faith you know that you are touching God Who resides at the center of your being. Your prayer now is not something that you *do*, so much as an entering into a state of *being*. You seem to be standing inside your real self, not outside. Inside your deepest reality you are truly centered *in* God. You stand in His holy presence, loving Him without words or images or props. The totality of your being is in a tranquil state of loving surrender.

Such integrated silence permeating your body, soul and spirit relationships before God can bring about complete hearing and listening with utter sincerity and honesty in the depths of your being. You must properly prepare your heart (Soil) for the reception of God's Word (Seed) that comes into your life at every moment of your existence. It requires a certain amount of time and asceticism. Persons, serious about contemplative prayer, busy people in a family situation, called to a job outside the home or community, often ask, "How long a time should I give to my individual prayer before God? How can loving communion be cajoled into a time slot?"

We all know that such integration of body, soul and spirit into a total person, dynamically aware of the gift of the other, does take a certain amount of time. From Father Maloney's own experience in directing many contemplative people, he holds that an hour would not be too minimal to be alone with God. He personally found it better to divide such an hour into a half hour during the middle of the night and another half hour upon rising. Others might find it better to devote an intense half hour of deep communion with the Triune God in the early morning and another half hour before evening meal. Remember, we are prompted to pray "incessantly".

## **LIVING IN GOD'S PRESENCE**

You cannot remain in such aloneness with God if you are also listening to God's call to go forth and witness to what you have experienced. The shepherds ran in haste to find in the stillness of a cave, the newborn Saviour, a Babe in the manger. They had need to go forth from that experience and share it with others. We reflect on: "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard, as it was spoken to them" (Luke 2:20).

Is this not similar to ourselves in prayer? We contemplate the mysteries that the Church, the Body of Christ with Jesus as the head, holds out to us so that we may experience exactly as we have been told in Truth. We encounter the good news in Christ Jesus our Lord and to that degree we go forth to glorify and praise God by the lives we live in that experienced oneness with Christ's body and all its members.

You can change your life gradually by pushing yourself gently under the power and movement of the Holy Spirit of Love, to align yourself in all your being with the Being of God as self-giving love. You wish to do all to please God. You desire to have no desire but to glorify God, to experience the majestic radiance and splendor that proves beyond any doubt His loving presence, to recognize His Divinity. This mystical conception of the Glory of God is manifested to humanity as illumination and light. The spiritual darkness of ignorance is totally dispelled by the Light of Mount Tabor. The Eternal Triune God becomes your “magnificent obsession.” Every thought, word and deed becomes motivated by the desire to love God with your whole heart. This is the primary command that Jesus calls us to obey. It is the great dignity to which you have been called when God created you “according to the image and after the likeness” of Christ, His Only-Begotten Son. By striving to become what you are in God’s love, you reach the state of inner harmony...*hesychia*... and oneness with God...*theosis*..., your neighbor and the entire universe around you. All God’s creatures, in whom He lives and moves, manifest your oneness with God and His creation in deep peace...as a condition where nothing is lacking...and joy.

### **JESUS STILL LIVES**

“...Fear not, I AM the alpha and omega, (the first and the last, the beginning and the end); I AM He Who lives, and was dead; and, behold, I Am alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of death and of Sheol” (Revelation 1:20).

Our faith in the resurrectional presence of Jesus Christ allows us to replace the towns of Galilee by our cities and countries of today. He is the same yesterday, today and always. He lives in you and me and in our material world. He walks along our sidewalks and near our streams, in our forests and woods and on our mountains, inside our prisons. He is still leaning over the maimed and the crippled, the epileptic and leprous, the evil possessed, the depressed and hopeless of our world and is bringing His healing love and compassion and His merciful kindness. The incarnate Word of God becomes enfleshed among us again, each and every day. And He calls you to birth Him into being into your world as Mary the Blessed Virgin Mother brought Him forth at Bethlehem.

By His Resurrectional Life (not restrained by time or place) He lives within you, and through you will come alive in others. He wishes to extend His healing, loving presence into the rest of the broken world as you stretch out your loving hands united to His to bring His living presence to all you meet during your earthly journey. Jesus has need of other human beings to become His Body, His hands and feet, His members. “...And through Him were created all things that are in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; whether imperial thrones or lordships or angelic orders or dominions, all things were in His hand and were created by Him; And He is before all things, and by Him all things are sustained. And He is the head of the body, the Church; for He is the beginning, the first-fruits of the resurrection from the dead, that in all things He might be first; For it pleased God to complete all things in Him; and by His hand to reconcile everything to Himself; and through His blood shed on the cross to make peace both for those who dwell on earth and for those who dwell in heaven” (Colossians 1:16-20).

Prior to proclaiming “Holy Gifts are for the Holy” during Divine Liturgy, the priest elevates his hands and prays “Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Your holy dwelling place and from the Throne of Glory of Your Kingdom, and come and sanctify us, You Who are seated on high with the Father, and Who are invisibly present here among us, and deem it proper to impart to us with Your mighty hand; Your Spotless Body and Precious Blood, AND THROUGH US, TO ALL YOUR PEOPLE!

## THE CALL OF CHRIST

We can thrill at the thought of Jesus Christ needing us poor and worthless servants to bring Him alive into our world. Like the disciples, we too are overwhelmed that He has called us to follow Him. It took them a long time to understand the aim of Christ's incarnation and death. It took them a long time to understand that the Kingdom of Christ would not come into existence without not only the death of Christ and His resurrection but also their own death to selfishness and their rising to Christ's Spirit of Love. You mean, God actually needs me? Emphatically, Yes!

Jesus asked of His disciples, and is asking of us each day in our morning aloneness with Him and in our touching Him throughout the day in recollection and remembrance, that we turn away from self-centeredness by a *metanoia* or inner conversion. The values by which we live must be centered now completely on God as manifested through the workings of God's Word, Jesus Christ, Whom we have consciously experienced as Kyrios (Lord), God and Saviour, and Master of our life...in contemplative prayer.

## YOUR RESPONSE

What will be your daily response to such a struggling challenge and invitation to follow Him in His glory? Will each day be a new birthing of Jesus and yourself into a new oneness, a new creation, He your Head, you His member? As you purify your heart of all selfishness and allow Him to enter into your life as your King and Lord, He will use your hands and feet, your eyes, your tongue, your whole being. He will work through you to bring *others* to know of the great love of the Father mirrored forth by His Son in His Spirit.

The birth, the Transfiguration, the cross, the death, the descent into Hades and resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus cannot be separated in God's plan of salvation as it unfolds within the confines of history...or...within the infinity of the Blessed Future Kingdom. Likewise as you experience the birth of Christ taking place within your heart each day in contemplative prayer, so you are to go forth and live your death and resurrection. You release the Christ-Life within Your-Life and in the lives of those to whom you are privileged to be available and present. You give in loving service, as Mary, the Mother of God gave, out of the abundance of the Jesus she had experienced as she "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:10).

## PSALM 34

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praises shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

The Lord Jesus Christ blesses you through His loving kindness and compassionate mercy!

*Fr. John Michael Zboyovski*