

Inscape June 2017

© Stillpoint Contemplative Ministries

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 Communion with the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

CHILDLIKE ABANDONMENT AND DEEPER PRAYER

As we move away from our own ego-centered activity in prayer, God's Spirit gives us a deeper infusion of faith, hope and love. Prayer becomes a state of becoming more surrendered to God, not only during our prayer time alone with God, but, above all, in the now moment of our daily living. Unless you are converted and become like a little child, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!

Simone Weil (1909–1943; French philosopher, mystic, and political activist) has described prayer as a patient waiting with expectancy. It is a paradox of tension that combines the absence and the presence of God; the already and the not yet; the returning and the going; tender loving possession and the agony of searching for the lost.

Prayer is a call to break the idols about God we have created according to our own self-centered needs. It is to answer God's call to conversion; to purify our hearts from the illusions of immortality, from the belief that we have an eternal beginning and no end and that we justify our own existence in ourselves.

But to enter into the process of death to self-centeredness and a "passover" to a deeper union with the triune God requires a tremendous discipline on our part. We do not want to "let go" of our illusory power which we think we can exert over God and others. We find ourselves resisting at every turn. We will do almost anything to remain "up on the surface," in command of our lives by means of our discursive powers. We try to fashion every situation to our own liking. We truly seek to create our own world. And many times, we mistakenly call this our "creative power!"

But in reality it is our power for *undoing* ourselves, for putting off the whole process of becoming the healed, wholly integrated person God knows us to be when from the depths of our being He calls us by our name "But now thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel: Fear not; for I have saved you, I have called you by your name because you are mine. When you shall pass through the sea, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you" (Isaiah 43: 1-2). We are masters at avoiding a confrontation with the real person that we are. We can play games, put on masks, become distracted by the words and values of the people around us. We can busy ourselves "saying" prayers. We can even use so-called "silent" prayer to avoid the real silence in which we look at our inner feelings in the presence of the triune, Indwelling God. In such real silence we look at both the light and the darkness that are struggling for possession of us.

As long as we indulge in such game-playing, we show that we are afraid to be silent. We fear to look inwardly and honestly ask for healing from the transcendent, immanent God. Our sins, our blindness and our wounds must be exposed to the Light of Christ before they can be healed by Him.

TRUST IN GOD

But if we are truly resolved to “deny ourselves” in order to have a part with Christ “And Jesus called the **people** and his **disciples**, and said to them, He who wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34); “And whoever does not take up his cross and follow Me, is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38), we need to develop a constant habit of childlike surrender of ourselves to God. We need to place all our trust in God’s perfect and ever-unveiling love for us in the present moment. We need to learn how to “pray incessantly (1 Thessalonians 5:17) by learning how to surrender in the context of each moment to God’s guiding, loving providence through childlike trust in His All-Perfect Merciful Love for us.

This childlike abandonment is not anything merely passive. Through constant ascetical purification by us of our hearts and continued *nepsis* or vigilance to be attentive to God’s energizing, “in-breaking” at all times, we Christians are called to “see” God working lovingly in all things. We are to contemplate Him as actively loving and caring for us in everything that happens. We are to strive to make Saint Paul’s words our daily experience: “We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love Him, with all those that He has called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

EXPERIENCING UNION WITH GOD THROUGH LOVE

Mysticism or the deepest levels of contemplative prayer concern our self-abandonment to God. We can only surrender ourselves to God to the degree that we have experienced His immense, burning love for us individually as unique persons created in His image and likeness. Mysticism is not a honeymoon with God. It is a process of self-emptying. It is a growth in consciousness of God’s loving concern for us. The result of this “mystical union” with God’s uncreated energies immanently living within us and loving us is that we are impelled to love God and neighbor in return with a similar self-giving (expecting nothing in return).

Love is always paradoxically measured by the degree of emptiness to which we are ready to submit on behalf of the beloved. We are not, in true love, looking for a reward or loving out of an “angle.” We do not seek God as a separated object given to us because we have done something to deserve Him as a reward. An inner compulsion nothing less than God’s own love in us, His uncreated energies of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, pushes us to new heights of letting go in self-surrender to God.

The higher levels of the mystical life touch the process of our being pushed by God’s grace, His loving activity as indwelling, to take our conscious knowledge of Himself and of the world and to bring it into the dark regions of the unexplored unconscious. In the absence of any sensible signs of God’s presence and love through consolation or images, the contemplative Christian yields the control over his/her life into God’s loving and watchful care. It is the handmaid of the Lord in her lowliness being lovingly regarded by God. In her emptiness the Mary in all of us is being filled with God’s grace, the true gift of Himself.

GOD, OUR ROCK

Jesus has come among us, gentle and humble of heart, and has given Himself to us in total emptying of Himself for us on the Precious and Life-Giving Cross. He has imaged for us the length, the breath, the height and the depth of the love of God the Father for us and all His

creation. He pours out His Spirit so that we may see that same loving presence pouring itself out in each event that surrounds us and breaks in upon us at every moment of our existence.

Yet we fail to see, to “come into” each event and there discover God’s call to build our lives upon Him as the cornerstone, as our Rock, our complete strength and support in our humble frailty and weakness. During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the priest kisses the Aer above the Diskos, the Chalice and the Antimins saying: “I will love You O Lord, my Strength; the Lord is my support and my refuge and my deliverer” (Psalm 18:1-2).

He calls us to believe in His infinite love. He begs us to trust in His faithful love in what will happen. “I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you” (Jeremiah 31:3). Above all, He calls us into a spiritual childhood that progressively becomes realized as we lovingly abandon our lives to His guidance.

He is God and, therefore, He can, in righteous justice, do with us whatever He wishes. This is called resignation and obedience to His Holy Will as manifested by His commands. But the Holy Spirit reveals in deeper prayer, in the depths of our consciousness, permeated by the Spirit’s infusion of increasing degrees of faith, hope and love, that God is our tender, loving Father. He is always acting at all times out of love for our happiness. But the Spirit convinces us by giving us new “eyes” to see that He acts always because He is a loving Father who cannot but love us in every detail of our daily living.

You may reach this conclusion by way of a head-trip, a logical deduction from the fact that God’s essence is love and He cannot act against His nature. But only the Spirit of the risen Jesus can bring this into our hearts and make this truth a transforming, operative reality in each moment. “...because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us” (Romans 5:5).

GOD TRULY LOVES YOU

God loves you infinitely. He already sees you as beautiful, His noble child. Jesus has already made it possible that you are, through His Spirit dwelling in you, a child of God (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). “Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God’s children” (1 John 3:1).

But why don’t you and I see what we really are? When will we give up our insecurities that we mistakenly think are our true strength? Contemplation is God’s freeing us from our false selves to allow us through His Spirit of love to enter into our true selves by living no longer we ourselves but Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20). But this unveiling of God’s perfect love for us takes place in the now moment of our human situation in which we find ourselves. It is a long process that extends itself even into the live to come through the purifying “therapy,” the fire of God’s love. But it is always beginning with the event of this moment.

Here God is now incarnating His loving Word again, now in your present life....not in Bethlehem. In this present now of your life, Jesus is raising and calling you to enter into the same process to the degree that you die to your false control and power over your own life in order to surrender childlike to the Father’s loving providence.

Jesus had promised us that if we wished to be His followers, we would have to renounce anything false in us, take up our crosses and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). For if anyone wants to save his/her life, it was necessary to lose it. It is not suffering crosses as an end. Abandonment is the greatest creative openness of the Christian to experience, even now

within the darkness of letting go in order to enter into the void, the in-filling of the risen Lord, who raises His followers to new levels of union with Him and His Father. “Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His Glory?” (Luke 24:26).

THE COURAGE TO BELIEVE

It takes courage to confront the fear of being alone with our inner poverty and weaknesses. To avow that we have turned away from self-love to begin an advance toward true human freedom and love brings us into a certain negativity. In true, healing solitude we confront our brokenness and “not-yet” condition. We recognize with Saint Paul: “This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body” (Romans 7:23). We cry out for mercy, knowing now in a total experience of inner poverty that we cannot heal ourselves.

It takes greater courage in solitude to take the next step: to enter into the loving presence of God and to believe with total commitment that God will be faithful to us. This was the courage in solitude that Abraham, Moses and Elijah showed in their total surrender to serve God.

The *Book of Hebrews* holds up Abraham especially as the Father of our Faith. “It was through his faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance....without knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham responded with an absolute fidelity to God. He found his transcendent, true self in the certitude of his faith in God. God is his absolute Center. He is free to ask Abraham anything. Abraham gives up his control over his life and paradoxically finds his full life in his fidelity to God.

ABANDONMENT IS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD

Such faith is a graceful gift of God’s personal presence to the broken, little ones of His Kingdom. He condescends to come to their side to help them. He pledges His unconditional word that He will be faithful. “Always true to His promises, Yahweh shows love in all he does” (Psalms 45:13).

When we are given such a gift of God’s presence as dynamically loving us in every event and moment, then complete abandonment is our true response to His fidelity to us. There is no longer any solitude, God is ever at our side. We are freed at last from our greatest fear of being alone, that no one will care for us. “With God on our side who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Saint Paul, like the early Christians, had experienced faith, not as an intellectual assent to a given revealed truth, but as an I-Thou relationship of God’s loving presence, acting out His fidelity in all circumstances of Paul’s life. He singles out his response to God’s fidelity. No trouble, no worry, no persecution, no lack of food or clothing, no threats or attacks could ever take him away from the love of Christ: “For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, nor any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 38-39).

CHILDREN OF GOD

This abandonment or letting go on our part flows from the faith that God's Holy Spirit infuses into us. In this gift we experience that we are loved absolutely and eternally by God, our loving Father. The Spirit of Jesus is sent into our hearts (Romans 5:5) and dwells there (Romans 8:9), giving us the experience that we are truly His children and we can call Him by the endearing, affectionate title of **ABBA**, [Daddy; Father] (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

This faith credits God with omnipotence—all are under His guiding power. But it goes beyond that. It credits God with being **my** Father. He loves me more tenderly, with greater constancy and concern, than any human being ever could. He is love and all His actions are directed out of His Fatherly Love for all His children and all of His creation.

I belong to God, my Father, because He has created me and continues to preserve me in existence. But God is uniquely my Father and yours because He has created us “according to His image” (Genesis 1:26), that is Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15). God has so loved us as to give us His Only-Begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16).

We are made participators of His very nature, by grace (2 Peter 1:4). We are born from above, by the power of God, to become children of God (John 1:12) by His will through Christ Jesus. This regeneration is brought about by the Holy Spirit (John 3:8) who dwells within us, making our bodies true temples of God (1 Colossians 3:16; 6:19).

THE TRANSFORMING HOLY SPIRIT

The redemptive work of Jesus Christ can be seen as an “un-concealment” of this awesome presence of the Indwelling Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but as creative fidelity in love to bring us ever more present in consciousness to this great love and thus surrender ourselves to become in the process loving children.

This is a state of highest, human expanded consciousness brought about by an increased infusion of faith, hope and love by the Holy Spirit. It is only the Spirit who assures us that we are united with God and truly growing in greater loving union. He gives us the courage and faith to surrender to God's love in all circumstances and thus progressively become more and more His loving children.

Now in abandoning ourselves to God's loving presence in each moment, we are able to pray incessantly because it is truly the power of the Spirit that prays within us as Saint Paul writes (Romans 8:27).

The Spirit allows us to let go of our preconceived ideas of reality, of what we deem to be important and not so important. He gives us a whole new set of values that are truly illogical to the worldly-minded (1 Colossians 1:18), that only the little children of the Kingdom of Heaven can understand (1 Colossians 2: 10-12).

The process in our spiritual transformation by the Holy Spirit into loving children of God in union with Jesus Christ, the First-Born of the Father (The Only-Begotten Son), is measured by the degree of surrender we make of our whole lives to the Father; (From the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom: “Asking that this day will be perfect, holy, peaceful and without sin, let us commend ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God. To You, O Lord”).

No longer do we “strive for perfection.” We relax and let go, yielding to the power of God's Spirit to effect what is impossible to us. We silence our dispersion outwardly toward the possession of things. We move into a state of habitual prayer of listening to the Father bring

forth His Word in us, ever so gently, ever so gradually, but always in the context of our daily lives and the events that make them up.

STILL-POINTED ATTENTIVENESS

Recollection or the inward silence of our hearts is striving for that “still point” of attentiveness so that God may speak His Word whenever and however He wishes. The Spirit pushes our consciousness down through various levels of knowledge until we sink into the “cloud of unknowing,” the state of surrendering our controlled knowledge of God and ourselves and of the world to a new knowledge that only the Spirit of God will infuse as a gift. He taps into the regions beneath the habitual surface of our existence that we learn to turn over to God’s healing love and control.

Paradoxically we experience that God does not abandonment us but we only then find Him as our loving Father and we realize with immense joy our true identity as His loving children. It is in the darkness of our creaturely poverty and sterility that we allow God to perform a new work of transforming us into new creatures in Christ Jesus. Solitude and poverty become community and the inheritance of Heaven with Christ forever.

AS YOU PRAY SO YOU LIVE

As you in your daily, personal prayer progressively come to surrender yourself totally to the providential, loving care of the triune God working within the depths of your being, so you will experience a continued state of loving abandonment to God in each moment. Such abandonment can be called “*Contemplative Prayer*.” It is no longer a state of “praying” for some minutes and then turning to perform tasks in your daily activities. Such an habitual state of childlike abandonment becomes a state of incessant prayer, of infused contemplation given by the Holy Spirit as you cooperate in each moment to live in active receptivity to God’s working in your life.

Thus you will be led from moment to moment into greater Light and greater Life as you see, by increased faith, hope and love, God’s loving presence in all events. Complete abandonment is the Holy Spirit’s gift to those ready to die to their false selves and begin to live in the truth of the new creatures that they are and have always been in the eyes of the heavenly Father. These words of J.P. De Caussade well summarize this teaching: “O my God, when will it please You to give me the grace of remaining habitually in that union of my will with Your adorable will, in which, without our saying anything, all is said, and in which we do everything by letting You act. In this perfect union of wills, we perform immense tasks because we work more in conformity with Your good pleasures; and yet we are dispensed from all toil because we place the care of everything in Your hands....Let me say then unceasingly through the habitual disposition of my heart: “Fiat! Yes, my God, yes, everything that you please. May Your holy desires be fulfilled in everything” (Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence).

Prayerfully in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Father John Michael Zboyovski