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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!

SURRENDER IN THE NOW MOMENT

We have hopefully followed Yahweh's injunction: "Be still and know I am your God" (Ps. 46:10). Stilling the noises within our hearts that cry out from the depths of our false ego, we have honestly been waiting attentively to hear God speak His healing Word.

Yet healing comes not only through God's Word found in Sacred Scripture. The Word of God is a two-edged sword that cleaves the soul, our human way of thinking, from the Spirit, the way God thinks. "For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the point of division between soul and spirit, and between the joints and marrow and bones, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). That Word, Jesus Christ (Logos), is operating with His Spirit of Love at every moment in the context of our human situation. What has been revealed in Scripture is meant to be experienced in our daily lives!

But concretely, your daily life unfolds only moment by moment. And the only moment you have as God's gifted time and place to meet Him and surrender to His loving activity is this *now* moment. You are meant to know the importance of your human situation, made up of so many pleasant and unpleasant moments, of so much darkness and light, of so many fears and also of loves.

We become contemplatives in a process of continued growth by "seeing" God unveiling His loving self-giving to us in this *now* moment and then in the same moment joyfully saying yes in returned self-surrender. May you and I learn the importance of embracing fully the richness of the present *now* moment and in that "place" that is holy because God is present as giving love, learn to give ourselves completely back to Him in loving adoration and service to others.

The best word to describe true Christian contemplation is the word "surrender." Contemplation is a continued process of experiencing God's infinite surrendering love to you and your return by the surrendering of your entire being to God in love. But where are you to discover God in His continued act of surrendering love to you except in the context of your daily life, in this present *now* moment? What moment will be the most apt and acceptable time in which you can surrender yourself in returned love, other than the present moment *now*?

God's love for you is constant, infinite and unchanging. His uncreated energies enfold you with a sameness that is eternal. God speaks to you from His everlasting, immutable, faithful *now* moment-less moment that embraces all moments of our earthly time. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you" (Jer. 31:3). Jesus said "For the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father" (John 16:27).

That love unfolds and meets you in the *now* situation in which you find yourself, an uncreated love that never changes; that bursts out always in new and surprising ways as God, Trinity, enters into your daily needs and counts all the hairs of your head, "But so far as you are concerned, even the hairs of your head are all numbered, therefore fear not..."(Luke 12:7) and meets all of your needs when you ask for them with the mind of Christ, "And whatever you ask in My name, I will do it for you, so that the Father may be glorified through His Son" (John 14:13); "If you remain with Me, and My words remain with you, whatever you ask shall be done for you (John 15:7).

From our point of view the inbreaking of God's loving providence yesterday and last year and years earlier is different in its manifestations. The past, as fast-moving water in a mountain stream, is precisely past from this present moment. It has passed you by and enriched you if you surrendered in that moment that once was the *now* encounter point of your contemplating God in His unfolding love. The future moments are hiding behind the clouds of the not-yet and the possible. Perhaps only one future moment of yesterday will be the moment of this *now* or this moment may be a surprise unplanned or unexpected by you as you gazed into the future.

THE REAL MOMENT IS NOW

Blaise Pascal (mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Christian philosopher from France, +1662) in a well known text comments on how we live under fear of the past or the future and thus lose the only contact we have with reality: "We never hold ourselves to the present time. We anticipate the future as coming too slowly in order to hasten its advent. Or we recall the past in order to stop its passage too rapidly. Too imprudently we err in times which are not ours and we do not think of what only is in our power, what truly does belong to us. So in vain do we hanker for those things which are no more and thus we let fly away, without batting an eyelash, the only thing that exists. This is the present which ordinarily wounds us. We hide it from view because it afflicts us. And if it is pleasing to us, we regret seeing it pass."

True contemplation is God's gift given to you in the Spirit's infused gifts of faith, hope and love that allow you to enter into the richness of each moment to adore, love and surrender to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A contemplative is a gifted human being, a "seer" capable of seeing into God's real world.

With such a gift you can see God in Holy Scripture, in the history of salvation and see the same God operating in your present human situation. You see the love of God incarnated in Jesus Christ who now is gloriously risen and inserted by His living presence into every atom and sub-atomic particle of the material world that surrounds you at every moment. You see this Jesus of Nazareth still multiplying the loaves, the Bread of Life, and giving Himself as food and drink in the Eucharist. You see Him within the Church, the people of God bound by the Holy Spirit's love in a community of service to extend Jesus Christ as the Light of the world. You see Him also in the teaching authority within the Body of Christ, His Church.

You learn daily to see Him in each person whom you meet, in each human activity and event of each day. Jesus Christ is shining diaphanously throughout the whole world for those who have the contemplative eyes of faith, hope and love to see Him, as Teilhard de Chardin in his *Divine Milieu* writes. You shout out your exciting discoveries of Jesus becoming incarnated again and again in the world around you as Mary and the shepherds of Bethlehem did. You share your gift of contemplative faith by instructing others as to how to have their spiritual eyes opened to see God as you are beginning to do.

THE EVENT

In such a Christian vision process you find God working in all things by His grace, His uncreated energies, touching you and drawing you always into a more intimate union with Himself. It is a contemplative vision that takes you from darkness and places you fully in the light of God's loving presence as the Ground not only of your very being but of that of all creatures. It is a true "unconcealment," an uncovering of what is always there; but through lack of faith we are kept from fully communicating with the ever-present and ever-loving God. He is totally present to and perfectly loving us. Are we present in each event and at each moment to God?

Faith, the work of the energizing Holy Spirit, removes before our eyes, like scales that fall away, the false masks from others and from ourselves. In a gentle security of knowing you are loved by the all-perfect God, you can let go of your need to interpret events or happenings according to darkened ideas that you may have been entertaining, especially from out of your false ego. You and I, because we do not have faith strong enough to convince us of God's love for us unto death in His Son Jesus, fashion opinions of ourselves and the world around us that are simply lies and do not present the "early real" as God sees it.

The event is, therefore, whatever is happening to you. The word is derived from the Latin word, *evenire*, to come out of. It dynamically presents you with a given moment out of which something is coming, being brought to birth. By faith you can say that God is coming out of this or that moment as your loving God. What is happening in this *now* moment is that God is calling you to find Him in this happening moment. It is not as if God has been sleeping and He now wakes up and "comes out" of the event as a butterfly emerges from the darkness of the cocoon. God has been there all the time, loving and giving Himself in the moments that preceded and prepared this moment. It is you and I who have to come out of our sleep and wake up to the reality of God's loving presence in each moment and in each event of our human situation. "And so you must discern that which is acceptable before our Lord. Have no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather condemn them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that are done by them in secret. For all things that are condemned are exposed by the light; and anything that is made manifest is light. Therefore it is said. Awake. O sleeper and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. Watch therefore, that you live a glorious life, not as foolish men but as wise (Eph. 5:10-15). "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober (1Thess. 5:6).

We have been unaware of the richness of God's love in those preceding moments, going all the way back to our birth. Now faith stirs us to awaken to God's inner presence inside the materiality of this moment. From your side, you go *into* the event, you discover by a finding inside the event what was already there. As God comes out of (*evenire*), you go into (*invenire*), and there in the given moment the loving union of two wills becoming one that we can call contemplation takes place.

In each event of each moment God is calling you into reality out of your shadowy existence. Your greatest work in life is the asceticism of listening to God's call, with utter openness and sincerity. It is a receptive readiness to swing freely wherever God leads. "Speak, Lord, Thy servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:1). Your most difficult ascetical struggle comes in what the Fathers of the Desert call *nepsis*, the constant, interior vigilance you are to exercise over every thought, feeling and imagination that could possibly throw you out of the faith dimension of being in Christ, back into the darkness of insecurity and fear of your false ego. "For the weapons which we use are not earthly weapons, but of the might of God by which we conquer rebellious strongholds. Casting down imaginations, and every false thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and capturing every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

In each event you discover by a new, positive awareness that you really are a child of God. "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 (1 John 3:1). You learn in the event to let go of negativity and you find the godly and the truthful in each moment. You learn to yield gently to God's loving presence in yourself so that you think and act as whole and healed, for that is what God sees you to be already in His love for you. Aggressiveness against others disappears as you gently let the presence of God come forth. With the Blessed and Most Holy Mother of God, Mary, you utter at each moment: "...Here I am, a handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word...(Luke 1:38). God in you...meets...the God in others and you discover the freeing joy that the Spirit has made you and them one in Christ.

THE PRESENT MOMENT

You cannot become who you are already in God's love except in the present moment that God is handing to you, as the sacred "place" to take off your shoes of security and fall down and worship Him before the burning bush. "Now Moses was feeding the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush was on fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here I am. And He said, Do not draw near; take your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you are standing is holy ground (Exodus 3: 1-5). For you as a faith-full Christian seeking the face of God in each event, it is this present moment in which you find a new Incarnation of God's self-giving love to you. Or perhaps it would be more true to say that God is again taking on "flesh", breaking into your world to pitch His tent with you, to bring His *Shekinah* or infinite glory into your darkened world. Or simply you could say that Jesus is being "unconcealed for you," for, since His first Incarnation, death and resurrection, He has never easily left you.

In this present moment God and you meet in the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, as Teilhard de Chardin writes "by the game of the resurrection." Jesus Christ is caught forever by a new presence inside matter. He touches it and reconciles it back to the Father through you and me finding in this present moment what the Father has eternally seen in His loving Word. The historical time of this *now* moment (in Greek, *chronos*) is carried over by the eternal *now* of God's healing (salvific time, the *kairos*). God's grace in His uncreated energies of love touches your free will and the Body-Being of His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is extended again into space and time.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRESENT MOMENT

If God is "inside" the stuff of each moment, He must be effecting what these signs are symbols of---His great self-giving love toward us. In his classic work, Jean Pierre de Caussade [(1675 –1751) a French Jesuit priest and author of *Abandonment to Divine Providence*], gives us the very suggestive phrase: "the sacrament of the present moment." Sacraments are visible signs made up of material things and gestures along with words that lead Christians, not only into what the signs signify, but also into an effective encounter with Jesus Christ who brings about by His Holy Spirit what the signs signify.

Through your faith that God is creatively present in each moment, you can, therefore, believe that He is in an analogous way effecting a sacramental self-giving to the Christian, thus bringing you into a greater union (theosis) with Himself. In the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist the celebrant of the Divine Liturgy breathes over bread and wine the words...Take and eat: This is My Body which is broken for you for the remission of sins...In like manner after supper, He took the chalice saying...All of you drink of this: this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). Through the calling down of the Holy Spirit (Epiklesis)...Furthermore we offer You this spiritual and bloodless sacrifice, and we implore, and pray and beg of You: Send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts that are offered here, And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ; And that which is in this chalice the precious Blood of Your Christ; Changing them by Your Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen!...the faithful enter into an "unconcealment" to find that these gifts are no longer mere bread and wine; a transfiguration has taken place. These are now the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom).

Also in the context of your Christian life the Holy Spirit gives you faith to see the Body of Christ in an analogous way being formed, or better, being revealed in the event of each moment. You can thus reverence and adore His Sacred Presence wherever you find yourself. As you surrender to His loving activity, God's Spirit reveals to you what Jesus has effected in the primal Eucharistic gift of Himself to you on the cross. In faith, hope and love with which you encounter God in each moment, you can joyfully relinquish control over your life, plans, desires for this moment. In total abandonment, you yield to God's dynamic, loving activity in this *now* event.

A LIVING, ACTIVE FAITH

It is not enough to open yourself to God's gift to you in the present moment. Contemplation is more than merely "seeing" God and worshiping Him. By faith you "see" God, get in touch with His loving activities and then work with Him in loving service to effect a transformation into something even better. Faith illuminates you in a freeing way to see God inside of the moment. But there is a freeing by faith also from yourself and the limitations that you and I so readily place upon ourselves and others. The negativity that believes you and others can do only so much is transcended by faith so that you can truly shout out to yourself and to the whole world: "I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me."

Faith does not lead you into presumption but into a true assessment of each situation and what you can do with God's help to change matters according to God's will... "Without Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). True gentleness and meekness are rooted in humility, in seeing reality through faith according to God's eyes. You can turn the other cheek to your enemies but God would want you also to work diligently at the same time to transform them by your love and prayerful intercession into your brothers and sisters. Faith works along with God's gift of human intelligence, but it allows you to see farther into the tunnel when your own human knowledge runs out of light.

Faith to believe in God's infinite love is rooted in the Word (Logos) of God. You learn through the illumination of the Holy Spirit to have an uncompromising openness to God's call in the history of salvation. It is through openness to Holy Scripture that we are able to enter into a faith act that convinces us that Jesus Christ is still speaking to us. Our faith in the Good News and His healing power breaking in upon us through the event of the present moment comes from a prayerful knowledge of Scripture.

CONTEMPLATION IS PRAYING ALWAYS

Ultimately abandoning yourself to God in the event of each moment brings you into a state of infused prayer that allows you to "pray incessantly," as Saint Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. You live in a constant remembrance of God in His loving self-giving to you in each moment. Because the Holy Spirit is pouring into your heart deeper faith, hope and love, you can thank God for all things because you will be able to see His loving presence and active goodness in each creature that comes into your life. Thanking Him for all things at all times, you will be always united in prayerful adoration and praise. "...In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). "Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God as long as I live" (Psalm 146: 1-2). You believe that the Lord God is "righteous in all His ways and merciful in all His works" (Psalm 145:17). Saint Isaac of Syria exhorts us to never forget that in God "there exists in Him a single love and compassion which is spread out over all creation, a love which is without alteration, timeless and everlasting".

The sign of a constant praying attitude in each event is the lack of excessive worries and the presence of a rejoicing heart. “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice. Let your humility be known to all men. Our Lord is at hand. Do not worry over things, but always by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ” (Philippians 4: 4-7). Not only will you find God in each moment, but you will in each moment respond to His loving presence. The Holy Eucharist is God’s gift of Himself totally to you in His Son Jesus through His Spirit. In your daily life, each moment is the “place” where you return your Eucharistic gift of yourself to God. This place, this *now* event, is holy, for God’s holy presence as love to you is unveiled there. It is holy because you respond by the power of the Holy Spirit to become God’s holy child. “Trust in God, and do good; dwell in the land, and seek after faithfulness. Trust in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37: 3-5).

God speaks to us as He spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you; and before you came out of the womb, I sanctified you and ordained you...” (Jeremiah 1:5). To be “sanctified” is to be made holy by God. We are not holy in ourselves, but we are holy because God is Holy. To be “ordained” by God means we are a vital part of His plan of salvation for all His creation. Truly our personal relationships with the Lord Jesus Christ...began...long before we knew and worshipped Him. We are children of God and co-heirs with Christ to the Eternal Kingdom of Love. In our everyday, routine living, we are to find the many varied ways to allow God’s radiant glory shine through us. We become living icons to everyone we meet in loving service to the “other”. We are on the road to perfection!

The Lord needs us...today...and every day...to be His light in His world. In the Light of Christ, we are called to consciously live and love within every moment of our existence in the presence of God and neighbor.

Prayerfully yours in Christ,
Fr. John Michael Zbojovski