

Practise Resurrection

A series of meditations for the Lent and Easter Seasons

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Practise Resurrection

Prayer is not telling God what to do, but becoming aware of just how intimately and immediately present God is to our world, to the ones we pray for and to ourselves.

Like Jacob waking up and exclaiming: “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it”, helping us realise that wherever we are “this [place] is the gate of heaven”.

The following guidelines for “practising resurrection” - for living fully, hopefully and creatively as possible- are not prescriptive, telling us what we should do or be- but descriptive. Like the Beatitudes (“Blessed are the poor in Spirit”, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” etc.), they describe how, when we adopt a certain disposition or attitude, in life, we can actually experience life, joy, peace, love and hope. Such dispositions suggested over the coming weeks focus essentially around an openness which allows us to wake up to the reality of grace.

The dispositions, offered here, or as they are sometimes called transcendental precepts, arise out of an inner necessity of the human spirit and open up the possibility of self-realisation and human authenticity. They point to a way where we come to our true selves by going beyond ourselves, discovering who we really are through awareness, love, responsibility and commitment.

Practising resurrection an invitation to enter into a way of life that leads to life. It is not about trying harder: it is not about achievement or success. These precepts are practical and practised ways of living in a grounded and real way, and they include the following ground-rules:

Is, not should: *reminding us how deadening the “should” and “oughts” in our lives can be*

Drawn, not driven: *hinting at the authentic and gentle movement of the Spirit of God, rescuing us from the tyranny of our addictions and compulsions*

Now, not then: *moving us away from the grip of regret about the past and anxiety about the future*

What, not why: *helping us focus on the reality or the facts of life rather than being lost in the endlessness of the often futile question “why?”*

Me, not you: *allowing us to move away from competitiveness and defensiveness into the grace-filled responsibility of learning to live out of our truth.*

Each week during the Lent and Easter seasons there will be a simple invitation to put into practice a disposition or attitude that allows you to become more fully human, more fully alive

Be present

Our true home is the present moment. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on this green earth in the present moment.

Thich Nhat Hanh

“Present” can mean both “gift” and “now”. To live now- is to live life as a gift.

We don't make God present. God **IS**. Prayer (with all its associated disciplines) is aimed, at the least, simply at our basic problem: our tendency to forget our “liberating connectedness” with God.

Take time.

Settle down.

Listen to sounds.

Look around.

Notice your breathing.

Relax.

Say gently and repeatedly: *Here I am*

Be attentive

*...in everyday life
it is the plain facts and natural happenings
that conceal God and reveal him to us
little by little under the mind's toolings*

R. S. Thomas

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN! Go for a slow walk. Enjoy the world around you. Use your senses - one at a time. "Cleanse the doors of perception" as William Blake would say, and learn to see and hear everything as it really is.

Look at something with your undivided attention- and let it look at you, engage you, and speak to you.

"The harder you look at something the harder it looks at you"

Gerard Manley Hopkins

(Each day) attend to your inner world

your everyday reactions and responses

your thoughts and your feelings –

without judging or putting yourself down.

And ask yourself - does this particular feeling, attitude etc. –

lead to life and freedom, or away from it?

Be accepting

...Not only to know where you are but to learn to love what you find there.

Kathleen Norris

If, as you get in touch with your story, it seems messy, confused or painful, ask yourself how you would be if someone told you a similar story. It is highly likely that you would be empathetic and compassionate. So why not try it out on yourself?

How prepared are you to own up to the fact that sometimes (at least) the things which really annoy you in others are in fact characteristics you despise in yourself?

Give yourself room to breathe –

hear an invitation to come home to yourself –

be hospitable –

and become your own best friend.

Be intelligent

I want to beg you as much as I can...to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves....

Rainer Maria Rilke

Our heads are (obviously) very important to us. Thinking and self-awareness mark us off from the rest of creation. But while our heads are good places to start, we are not supposed to live there!

So listen to your questions, doubts and fears.

Acknowledge them, but don't let them hijack you.

Often they are quite reductionist –

but remember: you are more than your doubts.

The openness of faith which Jesus of Nazareth asks of us is not irrational or unreasonable. On the contrary: as Anselm in the 12th Century said: it is a matter of “faith seeking understanding”.

Be responsible

Holiness means assuming total responsibility for all that we are and not simply for how we appear to other human beings.

Donald Nicholl

“Response” is at the heart of the meaning of responsibility. Just as everything is gift, so all genuine life is responsive.

Is your attitude or behaviour loving,

just,

good news for others,

and care-full of your own needs?

How open and free are you in adopting this stance?

Can you tell the difference between a reaction (sometimes called a disproportionate response!)

and a response?

How we are (as distinct from how we appear) speaks of the heart - the inner core or essence of a person - which the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures tell us is what God sees.

Be real

*Human living as it is normally perceived is an escape from reality.
The gospel message is a recall to reality, revealed as a mystery of forgiveness.*

Sebastian Moore

What we are being asked is to be as accurate or honest about ourselves. Facing and living out of our inner truth is a good description of humility. (“humus”= of the earth=grounded).

Jesus says the truth will set you free. There can be no freedom, in other words, unless and until. You face your truth.

**The place of fear is the place of grace.
As you face and embrace your fears,
you become real-
and this place, of which you’ve been so afraid,
is uncovered as “a mystery of forgiveness”.**

Be patient

Negative capability...that is, when a man (sic) is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.

John Keats

The poet R. S. Thomas says; “The meaning is in the waiting”. We plumb untold depths, push boundaries, and are extended when we learn to wait. Waiting sifts us; it is also a very fertile place.

Being patient before mystery is the mark of the mature person. Our task is not to clear things up, but to make things (perhaps) a little clearer. How prepared are you to say “I don’t know”?

**Can you explore your impatience –
and acknowledge your insecurities
or your need to control?**

Be gentle

People are hungry for a different space of self-hearing and self-healing...Beyond the turmoil, a tenderness. Beyond the anger and bitterness, something akin to forgiveness. This space is born from honesty...and from the presence of another person who is not afraid of a slow journey through the desert.

Michael Paul Gallagher

What opportunities do you seek to foster self-awareness?

What do you have in place - or at least desire- for nurturing your inner life?

Denying yourself such space is a way of devaluing yourself.

How gentle are you with yourself?

Can you identify in yourself a harsher spirit?

Where does this come from?

And even more importantly: where does it lead?

What insecurities, poor self-images, perfectionist attitudes or demanding images of God are you aware of in. yourself?

Have you found anyone with whom you can talk these things over?

Gather all the fragments

The goal of Christian life becomes not enlightenment but wholeness- an acceptance of this complicated and muddled bundle of experiences as a possible theatre for God's creative work.

Rowan Williams

Just to know that this is the place for "God's creative work" is a good place to begin. Have you any sense - however far from God you may seem, however "messed" up or confused - that here is tailor-made for God?

To notice –

and this usually takes courage, time and work –

that even our imperfections or mistakes need to be embraced –

for with God nothing is wasted.

Can you name feelings,

or a part of yourself,

which you ignore or reject?

Foster the imagination

The imagination is a discovery faculty, a faculty for seeing relationships, for seeing meanings that are special and even quite new.

Thomas Merton

“Imagination bodies forth/The forms of things unknown”. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*

The imagination does not explain, but evokes.

What is being called out from you at present?

Is there an image which arises in you that somehow says something about your life at present?

As you sit with your image, let it speak to you,

form you.

Cardinal Newman saw that we are moved to act not by ideas, but by what seizes our imaginations.

What images do you live by?

A poor, negative self-image robs us of vitality. A healthy, positive image moves us on. Images are at the heart of living with hope. Jesus imagined the world other than it is. He called it the Kingdom or the Reign of God.

Listen to what you want

Prayer is the place where we sort out our desires and where we are ourselves sorted out by the desires we choose to follow.

Barry and Ann Ulanov

Facing our desires demands courage. It is in the end self-defeating to deny our desires - even our desire for the wrong things. Our desires are the key to the journey of the spirit. How else can we wean ourselves off attachments and compulsions which are illusory, destructive and unsatisfactory?

**Look at some of the things you've wanted over the years –
and realize how strong desires can be - and how deceiving.**

Ask yourself now: what is it I really want?

What will really satisfy me?

Stay connected

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I knew all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation

Thomas Merton

It all depends on your point of view”: you can live as if the world is against you- and the result will be a constant struggle and fighting - and possible paranoia.

You can live as if the universe is largely an indifferent place. This will be better than the first option - but while it may lead to a certain responsibility and creativity - it will still breed fear and anxiety.

**Or you can live as if reality is fundamentally gracious –
that it provides opportunity –
despite bad things happening –
for growth, life, love, laughter and hope.
This leads to a radical trust,
delight in the “hidden wholeness” of humanity.
And to “spending and being spent” for the sake of others.**

Make life-giving decisions

To believe as against not believing is not to adopt an opinion, but to embrace a life.

Herbert Hodges

Look back and ask yourself about choices you have made in your life- and how you now feel about them.

How free do you feel in making choices?

**Or are you driven by the need to fulfil other' expectations,
or the need to keep up appearances?**

**Have you any sense that each day you are confronted by choices –
great and small -**

which will make a difference to your living?

Is this threatening?

or liberating?

We already have everything, but we don't know it, and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already have.

Thomas Merton

The glory of God is a human being fully alive

Ireneaus

Don't look at your "performance" – which all too often leads to:

I am not good enough.

I don't deserve to be any better etc.

But ask yourself:

Is my attitude towards life life-giving or death-dealing?

Creative or destructive?

Freeing or imprisoning?

Each day - as you get in touch with thoughts, images, voices, things you tell yourself - do you feel better or worse? Can you hear an invitation/challenge in all this to say YES to life? To be committed?

Today- like everyday- there is the invitation, to ***practise resurrection***.

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