

Sunday May 9, 2021

Sixth Sunday of Easter “Contemplation and Action”

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In today's Gospel Jesus gives us both an invitation and a commandment. He invites us to abide in his love, which is as merciful and expansive as the Father's own love. We are invited to rest deeply in the assurance of our belovedness. It's an invitation to contemplative prayer, in which we slow down, take time to listen deeply and open ourselves to the reality of God's presence with us.

Contemplative prayer is not something exotic. In fact, it is very immediate; it's about simply being present to the reality of God's love in the here and now.

There are several simple ways to enter into this contemplative practice. One of these, called *lectio divina*, involves simply reading a scripture passage slowly, two or three times, then sitting in silence to allow the words to sink in. If a particular word or phrase strikes you, let it speak to you. Why is God calling you to pay attention to that word today? How is it speaking into your life?

Another way, known as centering prayer, involves sitting quietly with the intention of simply being open to God, inviting God into your heart, often with a repeated word or phrase, like “Come, Lord Jesus!” Another contemplative prayer is simply being in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, where heart speaks to heart. In the words of St. John Vianney, “I look at Him and He looks at me!”

We come into contemplative prayer with an attitude of trust - trust in God's personal love and care for each of us, trust that God wants the best for us. Jesus promises to share his own joy with us, so that our joy may be complete. He assures us, “You are my friends.” He desires an intimate, honest relationship with us, such as friends enjoy. He reminds us, “You did not choose me but I chose you.” We are chosen by God to be in this loving relationship. Prayer nourishes this love and friendship with Jesus; we abide in His love.

This abiding is not something static; it is very dynamic. In the next breath, Jesus gives us a commandment: “Love one another.” These two movements - abiding in God's love and loving one another - are inextricably connected; they cannot be separated. Jesus tells us that the way we abide in his love is to love one another.

Out of our contemplation we are moved into action - to love and be present to others, to bring into the world the love we have received in prayer.

Our experience with others draws us back to prayer, where we bring the needs of the world before God. We entrust all to God's mercy and ask for the grace to continue to love and serve. Contemplation and action move back and forth like the waves of the sea - coming in and going out. We carry God's abiding love out into our encounters with others; we come back with the joys and sorrows we have witnessed as we return to God in prayer. Contemplation and action nourish each other. When they are integrated in us we become contemplatives in action, instruments of God's love.

As we wait in expectant hope for the gifts of Pentecost and continue to live these remaining weeks of pandemic lockdown, let us strive to deepen both in our contemplative prayer and in our actions of love. Jesus' invitation to abide in his love and his command to love one another have never been more important.

More than ever the world needs the peace, hope and love that we receive through a contemplative abiding in the love of Jesus.