Drink Deeply of Love

There are many good books written about contemplation but after reading them, we still may wonder, "Well, what is contemplation?" Contemplation is simply having an experience of God; it is having an experience of His love, His presence, and His Word within us.

St. Paul tells us of Christ's presence within us, ". . .the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to His holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory" (Col 1: 26, 27). This awareness of His presence within us is a tremendous truth and revelation! If we but knew the Gift of God, if we could but experience this great Gift of God. Every time we connect with God, something happens because God is vibrant, He's dynamic, He's pure love, and He's pure light.

How can we begin to know and experience God? We can't set up certain structures and make it happen; God initiates contemplation. Our desire deep within to draw closer to God is actually God initiating a deeper relationship with us. He is the One Who initiates and we need to respond. We can begin by cooperating with this desire to know and experience Him. He calls us, "Come to Me all you who are thirsty" (see Jn 6:35). This hunger and thirst for God draws us more deeply into contemplation. Jesus said, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst. . . for they will be satisfied" (Mt 5: 6). This is a beautiful invitation for those who hunger and thirst, for He will satisfy us. "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11: 28). God may be the last place naturally speaking that we tend to go when we are weary and burdened, but He says, "Come to Me and I will refresh you." In contemplation, when we come within and connect with Him, there's no refreshment quite like it!

Elizabeth of the Trinity was a tremendous contemplative who would "just sink into my Three." For most of us, sinking into the Trinity within doesn't come quite that easily; it's a process. One basic element that is needed to help us sink into our Three is silence. When the apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He said, "When you pray, go to your inner room (that's that inner room within), close the door. . . (Mt 6: 6). We need to shut the door to the distractions, our busyness, all the things that we need to do, and thinking about all the things that everyone else is doing. We need to shut the door and pray to the Father privately, in silence, in that inner solitude.

Silence itself brings forth an encounter with God in a beautiful way as we become aware of His presence and expect to connect with Him. Revelations happen in the silence; we see, hear, and experience things that wouldn't happen if we weren't still and listening. Elijah experienced God in the soft, still voice in the wind. God also speaks to us in the stillness. God is calling us into the silence, into a deep relationship with Him. God said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps 46: 10). In other words, "Be still and experience Me as God."

Contemplation is when we do the listening and God does the talking. Contemplative prayer is a dialogue that goes back and forth, but God is doing more of the talking than we are. Contemplative prayer is receiving. Jesus' personal prayer life was one of silence and solitude. Jesus would go off to lonely places to pray and would be absorbed in prayer. Jesus, who preached, taught, delivered and healed, Himself was absorbed in prayer. He was receiving from the Father. As Jesus received while in prayer, we, too, need to receive.

Sovereign movements of God happen in silence. For example, the Annunciation was shrouded in silence. There wasn't anyone else there other than Mary for this tremendous mystery. We've never heard anything like it—God becoming man, God becoming enfleshed in a woman. All this happened in silence. Then at Bethlehem only Mary and Joseph and the animals were there. Jesus wasn't even born in the inn where there were many people. Tremendous silence surrounds this great mystery. The shepherds were the first ones notified that a baby was born. Scripture says that when they came to the stable, they looked, and they saw. Nothing else was said. The shepherds went back rejoicing and started telling everyone. They were receiving gifts of the Spirit of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. In the silence they understood what had happened.

One of the greatest mysteries of God's silence is Jesus' thirty years in Nazareth. Thirty years! When we want to teach a child something, sometimes it can be hard to put into words. We have to show the child. God didn't explain the Nazareth years, but He is showing us where the value is in the silence, the hiddenness, and the growth in wisdom and light. We don't know anything about Nazareth other than one or two sentences when Jesus was twelve years old—He grew. It's like the Father is saying to us, "This is what I want you to do: grow in this inner silence, in this hidden life within." Jesus is most at home in the Nazareth years, growing within each of us. He only gave three years to His public ministry but thirty years to this growth of His life with God, this Wisdom within. This is so important. This is what He's still doing within each one of us today.

We see the silence of Calvary, where He became the Lamb being led to the slaughter, and He opened not His mouth (Is 53:7). Consider the silence of God at the most important moment of redemption, with a tremendous battle going on, and He opened not His mouth. Ponder the great mystery of silence that shrouded the Resurrection. Again, no one was there. Everyone arrived the next morning when He was gone. The tomb was empty. God is saying something to us about His revelation encountered in silence and the Eucharist itself. He has chosen to remain with us in this kind of silence. So it's revelation that happens in the silence. It's very, very important to God.

In the book of Revelation, John the contemplative stated that everything in heaven was silent for a half hour (Rv 8:1). All the angels stopped their singing. All the saints stopped whatever they were doing. It's unheard of that all of heaven was silent, but silence always comes before God's movement. The more silent He gets, the more He's going to move. It's almost like He commands it so that He has our attention.

And so He's saying, just stop. Stop what you're doing and take a little time. Just look and listen. Take time to welcome the Word. Take time to be a receiver. Active listening is a good way to do this. Listening itself is an act of silence. We have found that if we just listen to the silence, our minds go everywhere—distraction after distraction because there's a vacuum there. We can't listen to empty silence very long. So God showed us the way He taught His apostles, and that is to ask questions. When we read the Gospels, these men asked one question after another. The beauty of it is when we ask God questions, but only one question at a time, we can expect an answer. He knows we expect an answer, and He answers. So there's a dialogue. We are listening, but we're listening for His response to us. It's an active silence, and it keeps us very focused. It's a dialogue type of silence. Sometimes prayer can be a monologue, where we're doing all the talking and we're not giving God the chance to say anything. Well, He likes to speak, and He wants us to hear Him.

Isaiah said, "Every morning He opens my ears to hear" (Is 50:4). This is what He wants to do. He wants us to hear something from Him every single day. Jesus was kneeling there washing Peter's feet. By this time, Peter had a pretty good idea who Jesus was because he had had the revelation that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. So when Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God, is now kneeling at Peter's feet to wash them, Peter is horrified. He pulls back his feet saying, "God forbid you should wash my feet." Jesus says, "But Peter, if I don't, you can have no part of Me." Peter says, "Wash all of me" (see Jn 13:5-9)—he wanted His whole self washed because he so wanted to be part of Jesus.

I read that and said, “Lord, am I missing something here? There’s nothing in Scripture that warrants this tremendous change in Peter. What changed him? What happened? Did he receive a gift here? He understood something. You were communicating something to him. What was it?” Jesus’ answers usually are just one or two little sentences because He doesn’t want to give us too much or we can’t handle it. He said, “Well, you know Peter really loved Me.” I said, “Yes, he really did. He did love You. I know You loved Him so much that You were making him head of the Church.” He said, “But Peter was pretty macho. He was the leader, but Peter didn’t know how to receive yet.” He said, “Peter being a leader, Peter being macho, and Peter loving Me meant Peter wanted to do things for Me. And he did.”

But Jesus said, “Peter, I’m here in your midst as one who serves, and unless you know how to receive My ministry, receive My love, receive My servanthood, then Peter, you have nothing to give. I can’t use you.” That’s what He was indicating to Peter. Peter needed to become not just a lover and giver and a doer, but he had to become a receiver so that he could welcome the Word, so that he could welcome those graces, so that he could be filled up every day being absorbed as Jesus was in prayer, and then give it all away. Then Peter had something to give. That’s true, isn’t it? We can’t give something we don’t have.

So God is asking us to become receivers. We need to stop what we are doing and take time to become receivers and welcome the Word. A good way to start prayer can be, “Lord, I know You’re within me, but I need to experience You.” God is asking us to become receivers so that “he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.” (Eph 3: 16-21).

His invitation to us is to come and drink deeply. “Eat, friends; drink! Drink deeply of Love” (Sg 5:1)!

Excerpt from “Contemplative Love” by our Mother Foundress (M. Nadine)