

[email from Rev. Virginia Brown to Rivendell Companions, circa 2007]

Dear Companions,

While I was on retreat last week I read some good things in a book from the Assumption Abbey library, called *Contemplative Community: An interdisciplinary study*. (Editor: M. Basil Pennington. Washington, D.C.: Cistercian, 1972) It's articles from an international Cistercian conference, and often refers to the Cistercian context, but has lots of stuff which is more generally applicable. I made a note of a few quotes to pass along to you all, finding them relevant to some of our recent conversations and reflections. (I shared some of these at Bethlehem Chapter last Saturday morning.)

From Francis Martin, "Monastic Community and the Summary Statements in Acts":

Monasticism is a way of living. It is the expression of some deep intuition within the human spirit which seeks to concretize man's nostalgia for God and make of this yearning the mainspring of the way a man lives on this globe.

Every act of God, by the greatness of the potential it announces, and by the disillusionment of man's small capacity to realize it, is an act which points to the future. God stirred up such a vision of what could be, that he tore off the protective and cautious covering over man's heart and forced him to look into the abyss of what he truly longs for. Because God chose to act this way with this people, the salt of the haunting knowledge of God has stopped the world from settling into corruption. Man is challenged out of a resentful caution which seeks to wrest from a god of his own making a security that even man suspects it cannot give. The price paid for this salt is high. In the moving words of Gerhard von Rad (OT Theology, Vol. 2): "... this people had not been destined to find rest in a single revelation of God."

The contemplative attitude is one of openness to the transcendent. A way of life can properly be called "contemplative" when every detail in it is ordered toward fostering this "mindfulness of the Transcendent."

The unity of a community rests on the commitment of the members to a common goal and shared means. The common goal of the Christian contemplative community is to help each other to grow in love and responsiveness to God, adopting a form of life, in accord with its own proper traditions, that expresses and fosters this love and responsiveness in every detail of daily living. Since however each member has his particular perception of God and therefore his own particular response to a particular "call," commitment to the common goal of the contemplative community implies a commitment to pluralism.

From Chrysologus Waddell (Trappist, Gethsemani), "Liturgy and Christian Community":

It is normal that a person exposed to a few deep but transient graces of contemplative prayer should experience, and keenly, difficulties on the score of community and of prayer shared in common. But it is also suicidal of a budding would-be mystic decides at

this critical juncture to resolve his tensions by opting for contemplation as opposed to liturgy and community.

(After having insisted on how central and necessary community and liturgical prayer are, he concludes)

The mature contemplative should be experienced enough not to demand too much from community or from liturgy. If he has really tasted God in direct experience, he knows very well how poor (though rich), how fleeting (though meaningful for eternity) everything else is. The final pages of J.R.R. Tolkien's great Ring Cycle strike deep in the heart of any serious contemplative, who, like the Ringbearer Frodo, has been called on a quest that leads to the ultimate, a quest hopelessly beyond one's frail capabilities. In the moment of deepest truth, Frodo is wounded, and though he returns to the comfortable world of the Shire, his wound, which is an interior one, cannot heal. He is no longer whole, and knows that his wholeness and final happiness lie beyond, over the High Sea, past the Grey Havens, into the West. Others are whole, unwounded; and theirs is to live richly and fully on this side of the High Sea... (He quotes the conversation between Sam and Frodo at the end of the final chapter, about being "split in two.")

And that's the way it is with us. We cannot be too demanding with regard to the various things that make up our life. We cannot expect to find peace and full happiness in the things which bring peace and deep happiness to others less wounded than ourselves. We can rejoice with and for the others... But deep down, we know that this is not enough and can never be enough; and a certain peace comes with this realization. Hence, there is a surer wisdom in accepting our present situation as somewhat hopeless... (He quotes the very end of the Lord of the Rings, when Frodo glimpses the Undying Lands.)

(From another article – I think this was by someone writing from a sociological perspective)

In last analysis, we have only the choice between absurdity and obedience. Ab-surdus means "absolutely deaf;" ob-audire denotes the attitude of one who has learned to listen thoroughly, to listen with a heart attuned to the deepest meaning.

And finally, from Carlo Caretto, *The God Who Comes* (a wonderful little book; I think we may have it at Rivendell as well as here). This, I believe, was in the context of a discussion of Abraham and the "binding of Isaac," and it, like most everything about this story, moves me greatly:

God is God, and He puts everything right in His love for His creature. He will not permit him to come to harm in his act of loving Him.

Finally, here is the text for the Bethany song, which also came from the retreat and the drive home. I think Noel has the tune.

Maranatha

A song of Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany

O come to us, Lord Jesus, in every little one.
Each gift of hearth and bread and wine, for you, O Love, is done.
Be welcome in this house, my Friend and most beloved Guest.
In serving you is freedom; done for you, all work is blessed.

O come to us, Lord Jesus! Through wind and fire I wait,
and pour the costly, fragrant balm of stillness at your feet.
Be welcome in this house, my Friend and most beloved Guest.
My chosen portion is to rest in you, and give you rest.

O come to us, Lord Jesus, in sorrow, loss, and tomb;
I trust in you, O hidden Life, for whom each death makes room.
Stretch out your arms in welcome, Friend, that nothing may be lost;
receive us in your Father's house, O best beloved Host!

Tune: *Bethany*