



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Introduction: 'Contemplative Seeing'

Elizabeth Davis rsm (Newfoundland)

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things" (Ps 119:18). We now begin the fourth and final segment of Mercy Global Presence – *Integration*. We have completed the segments on "global," "mercy," and "presence." Now we seek to find the integration that brings us back to "Mercy Global Presence." We set out on this journey to shape new words, new images, new language, new theology, and new spirituality to enable us to find the energy we need to be Sisters of Mercy and people of mercy in our world so **"in need of God's compassion and Mercy"** as the MIA *Vision Statement* says. We could never have imagined how rich, how deep, and how moving this journey would be!

In seeking to find integration over the next four months, we will reflect on *contemplative seeing*, *a compassionate heart*, *mercy*, and *creating circles of mercy and a culture of mercy*. Just as this work has been an organic process unfolding in unimaginably creative ways, so, too, our integration cannot be an analytical exercise. Rather it is a *metissage*, a braiding of differences and new patterns, a gathering of the threads of our lived experience resplendent in all the colours and textures of Earth to create a new weaving of mercy.

As the journey unfolds, I invite you to let an image of braiding and weaving, of connection and integration find you. It may be an image from Earth (a stone, a crystal, the Northern or Southern lights), a sound (a chime, a birdsong, a baby's laugh), a colour (purple, teal), a shape (a spiral, a circle, a polyhedron), or a word (listen, come, love). The image may find you today or in four months' time, but it will find you if you are open, listening and hearing.

In May 2021, in the week following Pentecost Sunday, we will meet once more in three regional gatherings to reflect further on integration in our continued global conversations, cherishing the diversity and wisdoms among us. Please come to this gathering in your region and share your voice with your global sisters and brothers. *Mercy eNews* and the *mercyworld* website will have more detail about these regional gatherings over the coming months.

Contemplative Seeing

Let us begin our first theme in this four-month segment on "Integration": *contemplative seeing*. We will experience together the rich and diverse voices and images of the participants in this month's theme. If we were to create a word cloud to describe contemplation, it would include the words *seeing*, *eyes*, *heart*, *stillness*, *silence*, *presence*, *listening*, *openness*. Paradoxically, we will be using many words in this reflection to speak about that which really involves few words!

The word "contemplation" comes from the Latin "cum" ("with") and "templum" ("sacred space"), thus "with a sacred space." The sacred space of contemplation is that of the heart – my heart within the heart of Earth within the heart of the cosmos within the heart of God – truly a most sacred space. Contemplation is a personal act, it is a communal act, and it is a global act. Most of us would have been initially formed in contemplation as a personal act. Today, we know that we frequently meet in communal contemplation within a community of persons sharing the sacred space and the sacred time. Many of us have had that sacred experience in small family or community gatherings as well as in Chapters of religious congregations or church gatherings. More recent still in our awareness of global contemplation. During this past year, we lived global contemplation in our regional gatherings as well as in that most precious participation in "Living Cosmic Advent Wreath."

Over the next four months, I will use the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke (Lk 10:27-35) to image our four themes – *contemplative seeing, a compassionate heart, mercying, and creating circles of mercy and a culture of mercy* – all reflected through this teaching of Jesus.

Let us now begin to centre ourselves for our first theme – *contemplative seeing* – as we hear the words from the Good Samaritan parable, “Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity” (Lk 10:31-33). Note the phrase, “when he saw him, he passed by on the other side” (Greek καὶ ἰδὼν ἀντιπαρῆλθεν), repeated twice, and the parallel phrase, “when he saw him, he was moved with pity” (Greek καὶ ἰδὼν ἐσπλαγχνίσθη). Three men were travelling by, and each one saw the beaten person. Only one of the three men saw that person through contemplative eyes.

Seeing

Contemplation is first and foremost seeing, truly seeing, taking “a long loving look at the real.” It means truly seeing everyone and everything around us. William McNamara ocd told us, “The contemplative or mystic looks at each one and everyone, at each thing and everything, from the simple to the sublime, in the same loving way: with the desire to be broken open by the ineffable truth, vulnerability, and inner mystery of what they see and to respond fully to it.” Richard Rohr ofm adds, “Spirituality is about seeing—seeing things in their wholeness, which can only be done through the lens of our own wholeness. . . Only when we live and see through God can ‘everything belong.’”

Seeing is different from looking. The American author, Annie Dillard, says that, “The secret of seeing is...the pearl of great price...[and] although the pearl may be found, it may not be sought...although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise.” We hear in Thomas Merton’s words, “Stop looking and begin seeing. Looking means you already have something in mind for your eyes to find. But seeing is being open and receptive to what comes to the eye; your vision total and non-targeted.”

Seeing with the Eyes of God

Many spiritual writers have gone further and have spoken about contemplation as seeing with the eyes of God. Seven hundred years ago, Meister Eckhart expressed it so simply and so profoundly, “The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God’s eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.” Another German theologian, Dorothee Sölle, says, “Contemplation sees things as God sees them and leads to an active resistance to evil.”

Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart

The Episcopalian priest, Cynthia Bourgeault, uses the beautiful phrase, “contemplative heart seeing.” She says, “Contemplation is luminous seeing, seeing with the eye of the heart.” She frequently quotes the refrain from a collection of spiritual writings from the Eastern Orthodox Church called the *Philokalia*, “Put the mind in the heart.... Put the mind in the heart.... Stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart.”

We hear God’s promise in Ezekiel 36, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Jesus teaches us in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8).

And in the work of the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, we hear, “One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Presence in the sound of sheer silence

In 1 Kings 19, after his encounter with and victory over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel and in fear of reprisals by Queen Jezebel, Elijah has a deeply contemplative experience. God has directed him to go out and stand on the mountain of Horeb for the Lord is going to pass by. The usual indications of God's presence – the great wind, the earthquake, and the fire – come, but God is not present in them. Then after the fire comes “a sound of sheer silence” (1 Kgs 19:12). When Elijah hears this, he covers his face and goes out to meet God” (1 Kgs 19:13).

That same call to listen, not to the loud voice, but to the silent voice is echoed in Job 12:7-9, “But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?” The psalmist agrees, “Be still, and know that I am God!” (Ps 46:10). In a passage from Isaiah, especially dear to Sisters of Mercy since it was used to describe their founder, Catherine McAuley, by her contemporary Sisters, we read, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (Is 50:4).

This openness to listen is openness to presence, another essential element of contemplative seeing. Thomas Keating ocs, the American monk who taught us the contemplative way of praying through centering prayer, said, “Where silence meets presence, there we have contemplation.” Again, we quote Cynthia Bourgeault who says, “In essence, contemplative prayer is simply a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence.” The American poet, Mary Rose O'Reilly, says that contemplation has to do with “being awake, being there, being present, listening, creating a space for learning and for developing an inner life by your very attention to the moment.”

An often-used definition of contemplation is “loving presence to what is.” Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, the 17th century Carmelite friar, called it “the loving gaze that finds God everywhere.” In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul explains who God is to the Athenians and all those gathered in the Areopagus, “In God we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Contemplation in Action

Seeing, eyes, heart, stillness, silence, presence, listening, openness – all lead us to creating a sacred space where response emerges. Meister Eckhart states that, “What we have gathered in contemplation we give out in love.” This presence to God in whom “we live and love and have our being” means, in Gerald May's words, “immediate open presence in the world, directly perceiving and lovingly responding to things as they really are. . . In this sense, contemplation is an all-embracing quality of presence, including not only our own inner experience but also directly perceiving and responding to the situation and needs of the world around us. Rather than trying to balance contemplation and action, it is more accurate to see contemplation in action, undergirding and embracing everything.” Constance FitzGerald ocd speaks about contemplation in action when she says, “contemplation is not a validation of things as they are...but a constant questioning and restlessness that waits for and believes in the coming of a transformed vision of God... a new and integrating spirituality capable of creating a new politics and generating new social structures.”

Conclusion

Thankfully, contemplation is not for the perfect! There is a simple anonymous story which is told like this. *A boy went to church with his mother on a sunny Sunday morning. He was enthusiastic about the many colourful glass figures that the sun traced through the stained glass windows onto the floor and he excitedly asked his mother what this and that meant. She whispered that this was such and such a saint, and that was another. Some time afterward, in religion class, the teacher asked if anybody knew what a saint was. The excited boy, raising his hand, said "I do. **A saint is someone that the light shines through!**" The broken pieces of coloured glass that from the stained-glass windows are essential if the light is to shine through.*

For all of us contemplatives in action who are formed from so many pieces of broken glass, the Canadian Jewish poet and singer, Leonard Cohen, describes well what that means for us in a powerful verse from his song *Anthem*:

Ring out the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

A Reminder

Remember, in the days and months to come, as you continue to reflect on this last set of themes for *Mercy Global Presence*, braiding and weaving all into one, let your image find you!

Theological Imaginings: Contemplative Seeing

Mary Katherine Doyle rsm (Americas)

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see;”(Matt: 13:16). It is a gift to see beyond the first level of sight, to see beyond appearances into the heart of what is perceived. Contemplative seeing does that. It leads us beyond the surface into meaning. It moves us into the revelatory moment of sight. It is the experience of living sacramentality.

I learned this truth from a tree standing deep within an ancient Sequoia Grove. At first glance the tree was unremarkable, battered and beaten by hundreds of winters, scarred by searing lightening. But it stood, straight and tall, offering its word to generations of visitors.



As I gazed upon this ancient tree, I began to see more than a burnt Sequoia. I saw the scars of chainsaws where, inexplicably, humans had skinned this tree once called the Mother of the Forest. Section after section was stripped away, leaving the tree unprotected from the elements, from predator and flame. This proud tree had offered its silent hymn of praise to

God since the middle ages. Each day it reflected the beauty of simply being. Each day it gave a window into God's grandeur. It was 1854 when men cut away the Sequoia's bark. They wanted to prove to the world that such massive trees existed. They took the bark and reconstructed the tree at an exposition in London. The act was greeted with awe and horror; awe at the wonder of God's creation, horror that such beauty would be so violated. The outrage forced the grove to be protected by law. The violation of one tree led to the preservation of the grove for centuries to come. The Mother of the Forest surrendered her protection, surrendered her life but gave life to other trees. It was renamed the Sacrificial Tree.



The Sequoias are more than trees inspiring wonder. They are living parables. They are born through fire. Their seeds will not burst forth from their cones without fire's touch. They grow together, in small clusters surrounded by a community of other plants and smaller trees like dogwoods. Massive, they are also vulnerable, roots spreading out near the surface of the land. They are protected by their asbestos like bark protects the tree from the devastation of fire. When struck by lightning, its wound covers itself over leaving only a scar. It endures.

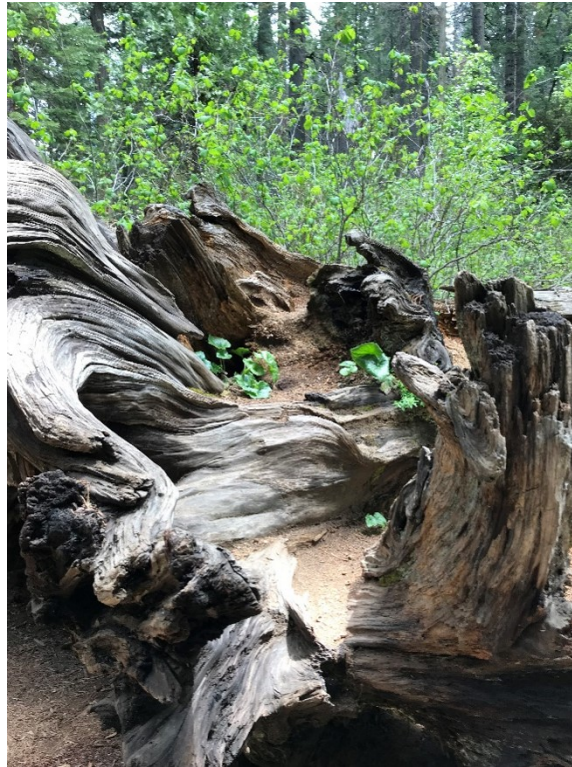
If you gaze at the tree with contemplative eyes, it is possible to see the story of endurance overcoming violence, of praise emerging from suffering. When you look up to its heights, you see two outstretched branches in *orans* pose, an invitation to offer praise in spite of wounds endured. The tree speaks of lasting fidelity. It is what it is, and in its authenticity, challenges contemporary gazers to ask, "How can humans ravish earth?". How can we strip away from another or earth itself what protects and sustains?

I have visited this Sacrificial Tree many times, and each visit reveals more. Each time I grieve for what we do to each other and to creation. Recently, in the midst of my reflection, I

looked up to the heights of the tree and was deeply startled. As time yearly carves away the surface of the tree, it left a lasting mark. Time carved a heart into the trunk of the tree.



The tree had spoken once again. When I saw the heart, I was reminded that sufferings embraced create loving hearts, create a new spaciousness within one's spirit. Where once that space was covered over, now it provides a homing place for small birds, forest creatures and turns nothing away. Contemplative seeing has created a bond of intimacy between this ancient tree and myself. It is part of the power of contemplative seeing, for when we gaze beyond the surface we are drawn into the unique and holy beauty that lies deep within another part of God's creation.



Perhaps a day will soon come when I return to the Sequoia grove and find that my tree has finally crashed to the ground. It will continue the journey of its return to earth from which it came, but it will be doing more than that. It will speak to me of resurrection. From its substance will spring new life. It will feed new growth even as it surrenders its own existence. It will draw me into the Paschal mystery and remind me that daily I must die and rise that others might live.

Joan Chittister OSM speaks powerfully to the dynamic of contemplative seeing saying:

“To be contemplative we must be in tune with the Sound of the universe. We must become aware of the sacred in every single element of life. We must bring beauty to birth in a poor and plastic world. We must heal the human community. We must grow in concert with the God who is within.”ⁱ Such a contemplative stance means being open to the sacramentality of creation, to internalize the words of Hopkins: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”.

Contemplative seeing is not limited to discovering the holy in the beauty of creation. It is about seeing the holy in the stranger, the outcast, the lonely and forgotten. It sees beyond human frailties and woundedness to the image of God dwelling within our brothers and sisters. It is the way Catherine McAuley saw the persons she was sent to serve, the way expressed in Matthew 25, “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.”

Each of us will discover our own Sacrificial Tree. Julian of Norwich found it in a hazelnut. Like Julian, one day we will hold in our hand a small piece of creation and hear God speaking to us through its holy gift.



ⁱ **Joan Chittister.** "Millennial wisdom stirs in the desert: amid mind-boggling change, monasticism's ancient truths remain vital. (Religious Life: Special Section)." [The Free Library](#). 1999 National Catholic Reporter 12 Sep. 2020



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Artistic Response: Contemplative Seeing

Ma Victoria Paderang rsm (Philippines) – ‘Looking through the eyes of love: Embrace with Mercy and Hope’



The abstract in the collage depicts a young girl, representing humanity & the world, who in being vulnerable and fragile, experiences pain, sadness and emptiness due to the harshness of life. Her right eye reflects the image of Ven. Catherine’s contemplative eye who wanted to reach out to the world with love. I believe that the world experiences real situations as we in our third world country do.

The Philippines is called the “~~Pearl of the Orient~~” for it is rich in culture and natural resources and named as the only Catholic country in Asia. On the contrary, people continue to suffer due to poverty, exploitation, devaluing of life and corruption. The throw away culture and the pandemic phenomenon are other factors that make people miserable. Despite this darkness and fear, we, the daughters of Catherine can still face the world with hope and courage for we are molded and guided with our **strong mercy charism and gifted with faith**. With our presence in the community, we continue to reach out to those who are the new faces of poverty. Let us continue to walk with them and share our faith and the blessings we receive. “Let us light that one little candle, light it with hope and warm with our embrace the suffering humanity with love and mercy.

As I reflect on these words of Pope Francis: “Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also consider today’s poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting”, I too ponder in my heart the same voice from our Mother Foundress which was loudly said and mercifully lived by looking through the eyes of love “THE POOR NEED HELP TODAY, NOT NEXT WEEK”.

Grassroots Ministry: Contemplative Seeing

Jo O'Donovan rsm (The Congregation): 'Contemplative Seeing in Hopkin's *Windhover*'

When I was asked over a year ago to contribute to the series on Mercy Global Presence I was quite eager. But now, in these pandemic times, I have no words. I turn to my friend Hopkins hoping to find in his poetry a filter through which I might puncture the ocean of silence lockdowns bring, and to *The Windhover*, considered by him to be his best poem. The poem is really a rendering in a new key the passion of Christ. And it also speaks a word to us in pandemic times of restriction on how the patient plod we endure can hide a shine if only we can see. Hopkins is a poet of the senses, of seeing, a contemplative seeing, always subtly responding to being addressed by Another. In retirement I had time to develop my long-term interest in him. It may be I talked about him a lot. A sister once asked me: Jo, why are you so interested in Hopkins? Is he a saint or something? I responded he is 'something' alright, a great poet and I enjoy his poetry, and added defensively, he is also a kind of saint!

The God-world relation and where we are in it matters to me as I taught theology. I faithfully transferred what I believed and the mode in which I believed it, to young heads. And not wanting to destroy their nascent wonder, here and there I called on poets to speak for me their wordless God-speak. As we know, Hopkins, like Wordsworth moves beyond borders. He is a romantic poet. But the clouds in the first line of Wordsworth's *Daffodils* symbolise the poet's own loneliness, whereas in Hopkins, clouds firstly engage us with themselves. The varying skies over the Clwyd valley in N. Wales, fronting St. Beuno's, were peopled with clouds. With an almost scientific attention to all aspects of nature in his Welsh years, his 'salad days', he wrote *The Windhover* and his well-known nature sonnets. These poems ask us to look, to see, to hear, to taste and touch. Citing with relish a fragment from an early Greek philosopher, Parmenides, he writes: 'Nothing is so pregnant and straightforward to the truth as the simple *yes* and *is*'.

At first it might seem to us to be an atomistic universe, a collection of things material and animate with persons like our selves. But such a universe without the living God would be unthinkable for Hopkins. The biblical creator God of Hopkins creates a multileveled and varied creation to be a common home for a variety of creatures. And such a universe, with levels in earth, rock and waters, in plant and animal life, and in 'World's loveliest – men's selves' is one where each individual shouts out its own particular gifts or 'selvings', showing forth its particular beauty and pain. Thus Hopkins calls us to look at and listen to every created reality at its own level, for each is a word of the Creator addressed to us and calling for our attention. What we must attend to are not vague generalities or classifications, but the *inscape* of things, their form, or their pattern, as it appeals to our senses. Indeed, the poet does say that imagining and wording the inscape of things is the very soul of art and poetry.

Many literary critics read Hopkins as the innovative poet of the form or inscape of things. But we get a more complete appreciation of him when we read him in the light of his biblical Christian and indeed Catholic faith. The Creator did not leave us with just a two-tiered universe. It is a world at once plural and one. Plural in that each creature mimes the diversity of divine presence in its own distinctive way. And one, in that the Creator's inscape for the world is one. It is Christ who 'plays in ten thousand places' (As *Kingfishers* poem). As R.K.R. Thornton aptly sums up 'Hopkins can only write about one thing: Everything IS: and everything is Christ.' Hopkins says the aim of his poetry is to word Incarnation. He invites us to a contemplative seeing of earth and our place in it, a seeing with our feet on the ground and a 'faith with eyes wide open', to use St Augustine's phrase. *The Windhover* is such a poem. It invites us to seeing and hearing with the whole self. With the little kestrel we are inserted into the noble passion of creation that mimes variously the Creator's own passion in Christ. Indeed, many of his poems can be read like psalms to the divine passion and glory of God shining through all things.

The Windhover.
To Christ Our Lord.

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
Of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in its riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend; the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for the bird, - the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous. O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Noel Maenefa, the dark hillock behind St Beuno's, with its rock chapel on top to which the Jesuit students sometimes went for liturgy, was a haunt for small hawks or kestrels. Up there, early one morning a kestrel, the poem's 'windhover' is 'caught' by the poet. The sharpness of 'Caught' alerts our attention to the very *thisness* of the kestrel – how its distinctive action shows off its selving, how it inscapes itself showing its revelatory depths. In his mind's eye, Hopkins sees the little hawk as royal, akin to the falcon of the French court, which was carried by the dauphin while riding. Such chivalric language gives nobility to the bird. We are seduced. The poet also seduced, waits with his heart in hiding. We rise with the bird as he strides in ecstasy and performs in the air. And when he reaches his high point, it is as if he has no more to give. The wimpling wing ring out bell-like in this heroic moment of stasis as he rebuffs the big wind. Such 'brute beauty and valour and act' exclaims Hopkins. The 'achieve' of the 'thing' in its natural state, whereas I, what am I doing? A moment of tension here and anxious questioning of self by the poet, but the capitalised AND leads to the answer. For in this new space the kestrel becomes a word for

Hopkins of another Knight, who was even more dangerous and lovely in his buckling on the Cross. Stirred with affection and relief, the poet cries out: 'O my chevalier'.

Hopkins finds a resting point here. Like the disciples who came down from the mountain of Tabor, in the final three lines the poet, at peace, lets the truth he has experienced bring healing to his life. Even though his years in Wales were some of the happiest, journal notes of the time mention that the arid scholastic philosophy/ theology programme of studies, left little room for imagination or spiritual nourishment. It was killing and deflating for a poet and literary man. But now recalling his baggage, he dismisses it; 'No wonder of it' he exclaims. For a larger world has broken in on him. And so the poet – ever the pastor – tells us readers that the windhover-Christ addresses us also bringing healing, heavenly and earthly, to our small passions and despairs. For the sheer plod of the everyday, even the silence and felt uselessness of lockdowns, can generate its own danger and loveliness. As when the plough's movement into earth's depths makes wet sillion shine. As when blue bleak embers fall, they gall themselves and gash gold vermillion. In this last parallel here, with its passion hints, the poet with the 'ah, my dear', of affection returns once again to his ever-present chevalier, Christ.

There is a realism about Hopkins' poetry and it can be very liberating. Liberating from the preoccupations with oneself – who or whatever that may be? – in the simple 'yes to what *is* there for us as other. And for eyes seeing with the faith of contemplative seeing, being liberated by a real divine presence, an Other that enjoys plurality and addresses it in mercy and love. Hopkins is quite biblical and sees creation as a major drama, a play of relations between God and the human. Like the windhover, each of us is inscaped to play a part in God's creative plan for the world that no one else can play. It is in this light that we can confidently say with St John Henry Newman, friend and mentor of the poet, that even in threatening times of loss, as during a pandemic, 'nothing in our lives is wasted.'

Mercy Global Action: Contemplative Seeing

Michelle Gorman rsm (Americas)

As I ponder the theme of contemplative seeing, I center myself in my solitary “home office” in Sacramento, California from which I have been zooming world-wide since March 17, 2020. From here I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Maidu and Nisenan peoples, and I invite the reader to do likewise from your location. I pause to consider the planet from which I have evolved, and on which we are all spinning together (North and South) at *approximately* 1,000 mph/1,600 km/h; moving together around the sun at an orbital speed of 67,000 mph/107,000 km/h; and cradled within the Milky Way Galaxy, swooshing in the direction of Andromeda at 1.3 million mph/2.1 million km/h. (1) With all that movement, I endeavor to be still, recalling T.S. Eliot’s enigmatic line, “The light is still at the still point of the turning world.” (2) And now I am realizing, to paraphrase a line from a Jackson Brown song: What I’ve been seeing isn’t what’s been happening at all! (3) Nothing is still, not even me! Perhaps the light is still, and light is necessary for accurate seeing. Or is it? Theodore Roethke begins one of his poems thus: In a dark time the eye begins to see: In a dark time the eye begins to see. (4)

In the daylight, my brain interprets and attempts to make meaning of what my eyes look upon; at night, in the dark, through my spider-webbed, dust covered window, a galaxy light-years away reveals its light to my myopic eyes. I don’t know the details but I am drawn into mystery, and grasp for a moment the hidden wholeness of things. (5) This awareness steadies me during the daytime when I have to face my barely aware complicity in the suffering of the world, especially of my dark brothers and sisters- suffering caused by my smallness of vision and that of my light-skinned ancestors. Perhaps our ancestors should have evolved to sleep during the day when we are enveloped in a womb of limited seeing created by a blue sky and a too-bright sun that shuts out the light of the stars and makes us forget the vast elegant creation within which we are intimately and inextricably connected. Had we evolved to be awake at night, maybe we would wonder more, praise more, love more in a night that offers us a view into infinity, a view of our particular context within the whole. Perhaps we would have had less need to dominate and control. But that is not how we evolved. In a dark time the eye begins to see.

This past year, the global coronavirus pandemic focused our attention long enough for us to realize that we humans are ultimately not in control of nature’s processes; however, with contemplative seeing, we can choose how we live together on this finite planet. The brutal murder of George Floyd focused a light on the unacknowledged violence of racism, not only in the US, but also throughout the world. People said and continue to say that “we are living in such dark times,” each time using the word dark as if dark is evil and light is good. Indeed, the pandemic made it seem as if a light had gone out, and many realized in the solitary gloom of confinement that what they had been seeing wasn’t what was happening at all. Discovering that George Floyd’s murder was anything but an isolated case brought a

glimmer of insight into eyes that had been fogged over with delusion and ignorance of the impact of racism and its many manifestations. The primal fear of the dark- dark people, dark woods, dark moods had programmed light-skinned people to pit light against dark in a never-ending battle for domination and supremacy. In a dark time the eye begins to see.

Contemplative seeing is the willingness to sit in the dark and let the truth reveal itself to my inner and outer eyes without my need to control the outcome- to let the truth “dawn” on me- and in that dawning, to be transformed. Perhaps, this was the state of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. (6) They are downcast and dejected, disappointed that what they expected had not happened. “Our own hope had been...” They couldn’t get past their view of how they wanted things to turn out. The resurrectional transformational leap required of them from their limited perspective was impossible (even after living with Jesus, witnessing his healing works, and hearing his teachings on the meaning of the reign of God). They did not contemplatively see what was happening until Jesus accompanied them personally (not in a group), until their hearts burned within and they finally recognized him in the breaking of the bread. He did not hold their weaknesses against them on that road; he had already forgiven them:

Jesus’s last breath was a word of forgiveness
He broke through the barrier
of the hardened heart and loved
to the end that never ends.

Forgiveness *is* resurrected life,
The power of hope joins the power of love
And gives birth to the power
Of the future. (7)

In this so-called dark time, what will we let our eyes contemplatively see- we, whom the universe, “mother of all life, doesn’t [see] that it [sees] until we arrive?” (8) We have inherited a great responsibility, and the future of our planet depends to a large degree on how we choose to live from now on. Will we be informed by the experiences of those whom we may have overlooked in our certainties? Will we help repair the wrongs inherited from our ancestors in ways that lead to freedom and love rather than in the prolongation of suffering? “For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” (9) Maya Angelou, in her poem, “A Brave and Startling Truth,” invites us to contemplatively see and distinguish what is brave and what is startling; she believes in our capacity to be transformed if we choose to engage in the necessary difficult decisions:

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is *when*, and *only when*
We come to it. (10)

Let us pray with Catherine McAuley: "Teach me to cast myself entirely into the arms of your loving providence with a most lively unlimited confidence in your compassionate tender pity." (10) Help me to see beyond my myopic vision to that which leads to freedom and justice for all- "a condition of complete simplicity- costing not less than everything." (11)

Resources

1. Andrew Fraknoi, "How Fast Are You Moving When You Are Sitting Still?" Foothill College & the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, 390 Ashton Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94112, # 71, Spring, 2007.
2. T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *Four Quartets*, HBJ Book, New York and London, 1943.
3. Jackson Brown, "Fountain of Sorrow," in album *Late for the Sky*, 1974.
4. Theodore Roethke, "In a Dark Time," *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*, Doubleday, 1961.
5. Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2009.
6. Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35.
7. Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science and the Human Journey*, "Vespers," Orbis Press, NY, 2021.
8. Delio, *op.cit.*, "Matins."
9. bell hooks, www.brainyquote.com
10. Maya Angelou, "A Brave and Startling Truth," published in a commemorative booklet for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UN, Random House, NY, 1995.
11. Catherine McAuley, *Suscipe*.
12. T. S. Eliot, *op.cit.*, "Little Gidding."

Distinct Voice: Contemplative Seeing

Maria Teresa Retana (Philippines): ‘A “Misericordian” Response to these Difficult Times

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a great challenge to me as a principal of the Basic Education Department of Holy Infant College, Tacloban City, Philippines, a school owned and administered by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, and as a volunteer worker of Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish, supervised by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (*Redemptorists*).

The effects of this pandemic were felt by everyone abruptly and intensely and it has impacted on the world’s economic, social, political aspects and most of all our health. With the enforcement of strict home quarantine and community lock-downs, closure of some businesses, travel restrictions, banning of gatherings of people which caused limited time and space for interaction and socialization, I can’t help but ask, what is going to happen to humanity now?

God has showered me with bountiful blessings in my life, for which I am grateful. But I was confronted with uncertainties and my anxiety heightened when classes were suspended and flexi-work was implemented in our work place. Like everyone else, a major question occupied my mind: *“How will we survive?”*. Life then became very difficult. But when conditions worsened, I became more concerned with the relevance of my presence as a parish worker to this present situation. *In what way can I best live up to my calling as Misericordian? How can I respond to the needs of others and how can I experience a deeper connection with them?*

Despite this distressing and painful experience, I started seeing God’s presence in this crisis. I called on God in prayer with bended knees and kept on pondering His Words *“Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”* (Mt. 6:26).

God can never be outdone in His generosity. The parish organized a relief operation for the most affected parishioners, such as senior citizens, drivers, laundry women and construction workers who rely on their daily income to provide for their families. Life has to go on, so that despite the struggle, I joyfully became involved in the many parish initiatives to reach out with compassionate heart to the most needy, including the conduct of counseling and mental health related activities. I realized that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy can still be shared even in the outbreak of this pandemic.

I am always grateful to God for the opportunity to be of service to others through mercy education and parish ministries. I profoundly commit to continue serving as lector/commentator, catechist and will never cease singing songs of praise to God in the Eucharistic celebrations together with other selfless fellow workers in the vineyard of the Lord, *“We shall be shining lamps giving light to all around us”* (Ven. Catherine McAuley).

We face hurdles and overcome whatever crosses us in taking the path of “Mercy” which our loving God calls us to tread with everyone in our care. This time of “pause”, is an invitation from God to look at our lives, to see and believe that what matters most is to trust fully in God’s divine providence. As a *Misericordian*, I continue to be the voice that echoes the Mercy of God to His people. I believe that everything has a purpose, and it works according to His plan.

CONTEMPLATIVE SEEING

The Opening of Eyes — from Sight to Insight

*Then Jesus laid his hands on the man's eyes again
and he could see perfectly. – Mark 8:25*



Create a Prayer Space

You might set a table with a cloth or scarf, a candle, something beautiful from the natural world, a jug, bread and wine. The candle is lit.

Entering into the Stillness

Facilitator:

We sit relaxed and quiet, ready to pray.
Our work we lay aside.
We breathe softly and gently.
There is nothing else we have to do right now
– other than to fall into deeper and deeper stillness.

Quiet time:

Silence for 1 or 2 minutes.

Facilitator:

Look around you.
Focus for a few minutes
on something that is absolutely still.
Feel its stillness
and calmness in your body.

Facilitator:

Let us pray.

All:

Dig a well of stillness
Deep into my being O God
down through my thoughts, feelings, concerns,
desires...

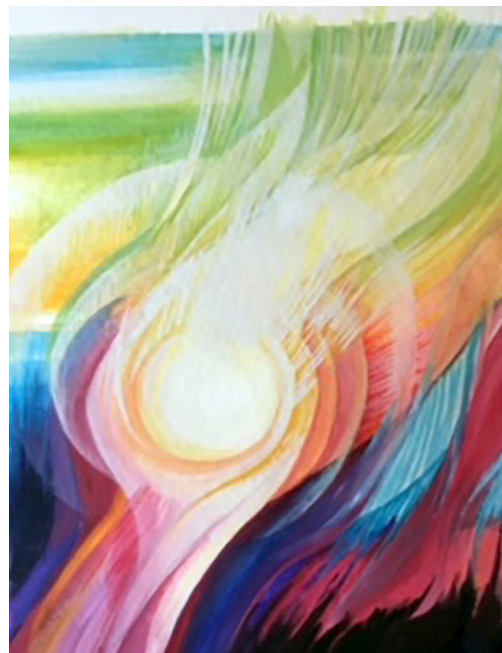
Deepen and broaden it within me,
help me to let go and loosen up my life a while
for Your proddings and promptings
to seep in through its sides in time
and fill my heart
with Your desires
for Love not costs
to direct my Life Flow.

Noel Davis

*A Well of Stillness from Campfire of the Heart
(Used with permission)*

Art © Mary Southard CSJ, (used with permission)

**Top right: Sacred-Eyes
Bottom right: Being in the Presence of Love**



Visio Divina (Guided)

Allowing God to speak to you through images.

Seeing

Slowly and gently let your eyes wander over the painting.



Art © Mary Southard CSJ, (used with permission)

Contemplating

Let your eyes rest for a while on a part of the painting that attracts you and stirs your interest.

Insight

What are you experiencing in body, mind, heart?

Sharing

Does the image that attracted you, call to mind something that is happening in yourself and in the world today?

Revisiting the Painting

Do you see something in the painting that you missed before?

Sharing

What name would you give to the painting?

Looking Outwards

Do you feel invited to respond, with compassion and mercy, to any issue that emerged in this sharing?

Pray silently for the grace to do this.

Rest once more in the stillness and silence.

Leader:

We give thanks for 'The Gift of Sight'

Shared readers:

What a great gift
of sight I was given
being able, when I have
understood something
to say, now I see.
To see the light
and the way that
its sister shadow
reveals the form
of things – and
when the light moves
the form changes –
And we say, isn't that
a beautiful red –
when the light
comes through our wine.

I love the sight of light
when it falls on water
and leaves, and these words
as they come together
to say what I have seen –
and I am thankful
for the seeing I do when I am unaware.

What a great gift it is
to see my lover,
my child, my friends
to see this day
and all the days
of my life – my eyes
are always there
telling me about
the grain of wood,
the miracle of
a piece of fruit,
a slice of bread,
A creative form
the magic order
or the folds of fabric –
even the sight of
the sound of things,
of rustling sheets
and fingers making music.

All this time, my eyes
have served me and
given me untold gifts
of life and living and
of being in the world
and part of
the life of God.
Amen.

From Tom Bass, *Occasional Prayers* (1998:43)
Milton-Freewater: Centre for Creative Ministries

Everyday,

I see something so motionless
that it stills me down.

Everyday,

I see something that cries out for mercy
and compassion.

Everyday,

I see something so beautiful
that it fills me with joy.



Closing Song

Open My Eyes – Jesse Manibusan

link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbihOyKIvi8>