Meditation Group: Hope Trails Alongside. Remembering Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr

A Meditation on Purification, in the Centering Prayer Tradition, words from Sr Marie.

This reflection and meditation can be done without the Youtube video (recommend the use of Youtube if you can). For those who struggle with hearing, the text below can also be used to support the video. Our Youtube presentation is an invitation to spiritually join regular meditators at Wisdom Centre (presently isolated and meditating in their own homes). The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions

The text is on the screen with narration. Music and a count down timer are part of the presentation. For technical reasons, the reflection occasionally has some disruption to the sound quality. To overcome this, a transcript is below.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition, followed by some guidelines on the steps of meditation (Lectio Divina)

Opening Prayer: Sr Marie opens with the usual Wisdom House Prayer

This is the first time I am doing anything like this. I came up to the prayer room in Wisdom Centre to make the recording so that I could imagine you sitting here whilst doing it and get the real feeling.

Prayer: Wisdom, source of all being, saviour, Holy Spirit. We welcome your presence at the centre of our being. We bring to you those people, thoughts and situations we have our own on our own hearts, that you may work in us and others in accordance with your will.

May we celebrate the depths of mysticism and self-understanding. May we celebrate love of earth, the body, and commitment to faithfulness, community stability, peace and justice making. May the words of the mystics assist us in our awakening. May we travel lightly through life, while contributing to the shared commitment of creating a future worthy of our nobility as sons and daughters of Wisdom, the source of all. Letting go of all else, in contemplation we surrender in love to you. Let our sacred word be a symbol of our consent to your loving presence and healing. May we be faithful to this word, so that it rises in our hearts, awakening that sense of your presence. **Amen.**

First Reading: A Transforming Encounter (Bold script, Sr Marie's words)

This past week I learnt of the death of one of my favourite authors: Macrina Weidekehr, OSB. I am going to share with you part of an article that Judith Vallente, one of her friends and a Benedictine Oblate, wrote in a journal I received this week.

"There are people we encounter who transform our lives. We meet them by a grace that we neither expect nor deserve. For me, Benedictine Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr was one of those people. She died April 24 of a brain tumour at the age of 80. I have been reflecting on a few of our experiences together that **reveal her expansive spirit.**

I became acquainted with Sister Macrina first through her books on Benedictine spirituality, starting with *Seven Sacred Pauses*, then *The Song of the Seed*, *Abide*, and on down the line until I had read every one of her works. **She wrote as I imagined a mystic would: keenly attuned to reality and to the meaning and truth behind everyday experiences that the rest of us are too distracted or self-absorbed to perceive.**

In 2016, I was invited to guide a retreat for her monastic community in Arkansas. Because of my awe for Sister Macrina's writing, I almost said no to the invitation. I questioned what I possibly could offer a community that included **a modern-day prophet.**

Another Benedictine mentor of mine encouraged me to say yes. Deep down, I knew I would regret missing the chance to meet Sister Macrina in person if I had said no.

When it was time to make my first presentation, Sister Macrina was seated to one side of the meeting room. As I arranged my papers at the podium, **she stood for a moment, clasped her hands together, and gave me a bow.**

I still tear up thinking of that moment of grace. That generous gesture from a master teacher gave me the confidence I needed to forge on with my presentation, impoverished as it might be.

The night before I was to leave for home, she came to my room with another Sister. I wish I could recall the conversation that night. What I remember is our laughter, **the sheer joy of simply being together.**

When I returned to the monastery in March 2019 to give another program, I was able to spend much more one-on-one time with Sister Macrina. She showed me her room in the new monastery, which the sisters had just moved into. She loved the view from her room and had placed some pillows and blankets on a window seat. **The window looked out on the monastery's cemetery and some tall pines. Death and life, she said**.

We took a walk on a summer-like afternoon in the park, where children were chasing ducks and men were fishing in the pond. Spring wildflowers spread out in an array of colours. Sister Macrina **would stop in midsentence to gasp with delight** at the sight of a patch of bluebells or purple clover.

After our walk, we went on to enjoy some refreshment. It is hard to believe that a little over a year later this fun-loving woman would be gone from **a world that brought her so many simple delights.**

Sister Macrina decided to let her diagnosis take its course rather than spend whatever time she had left trapped in hospital rooms in an endless whirl of tests and procedures. Something she shared with me on that last visit seems prescient now. She told me, **"Hope trails alongside me like my best friend no matter how desperate I might feel."**

They weren't just words. It was her way of life. In her last weeks, she asked to be wheeled outside to watch the sun rise, to see the April "super moon" and the pink and orange azaleas and purple irises bursting open on her monastery's grounds.

Words she wrote well before the current pandemic seem to speak our current struggles. **"We sometimes forget how important it is that we always honour the need to be still, motionless, not moving at all,"** she wrote in one of her essays. **"How difficult it is to stand silent and unmoving with our flask of oil, which is our very being, and let God anoint our restless hearts."**

Throughout her illness, Sister Macrina's family members, her vast number of friends, and most especially her monastic sisters were by her side to "anoint" her heart.

Sister Macrina once said she wanted to be a blessing to others, "another Christ, a servant leader, a disciplined disciple." She was all that and more. **She taught us to give thanks always, for hope trails alongside us like a best friend."**

Second Reading: The Flowing Grace of Now

Macrina wrote her last book "The Flowing Grace of Now" which was published last year. The subtitle is "Encountering Wisdom through the weeks of the Year"…

Judith wrote about the book "Macrina is a **modern day mystic**. She shows those of us yearning for a more profound spiritual life how to make our reading of scripture truly *lectio divina*, sacred reading, that is **deeply meditative and ultimately life changing**."

I would like to share part of one of the chapters in this book based on a reading from Isaiah 19:1-4

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
But I said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God."

Isaiah speaks confidently about being called from birth and clothed with a name. The idea of being intimately known while still in the womb is mesmerising. Take a few moments as part of your prayers to ponder this concept as a reality. Have you ever had a sense of being intimately known by God while still in the womb? Listen intently to that question. And what about the name God gave you?

It is an inner name that is being referred to in this text. The servant of God speaks of coming forth from the womb bearing a divine imprint. Doing the work of God is not always easy, yet the voice rising out of this text proclaims the truth of an ancient inner strength that abides in human flesh. God is revealed as a companioning presence from birth and as the One who gives us our name.

Each of us has a name deeper than the name given us by our parents. It is an inner name, etched in the soul. Unlike our DNA it cannot be measured or recorded it can only be revealed and discovered and eventually proclaimed and lived..

Hold dear the name given you at birth even as you listen for your new name. My inner name came to me while leading a retreat. I didn't hear an actual voice calling out my name it was more like a little bell ringing in my heart's ear. It rang out crystal clear: Joyous clay! Joyous Clay! And now I live my life trying to be that joyous clay.

O birth giving God, let me hear the name you gave me in my mother's womb. Help me discover the words I was born to proclaim. Teach me to honour my daily birth into your love. Amen.

Marie introduces meditation, and the importance of posture and comfort…

Now we will begin our time of meditation which will last for 25 minutes. I invite you to take up the position you feel most comfortable in to meditate…..be aware of you position, your breathing, your letting go of the worries of today. We could be conscious of praying together with all…bell sounds etc.

Beginning Meditation

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Final blessing

This meditation grew out of the death of Macrina Weidekehr. Today we are overwhelmed with all the deaths in the world coming from Corinavirus. We know they are not yet finished.

To end our prayers tonight I invite you to listen to some words from John O'Donahue from his Blessing for the Dying:

May death come gently towards you,
Leaving you time to make your way
Through the cold embrace of fear
To the place of inner tranquillity.

May your leave taking be gracious,
Enabling you to hold dignity
Through awkwardness and illness.

May you see the reflection
Of your life's kindness and beauty
In all the tears that fall for you. Amen.

Ends with usual closing prayers: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life, we in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters around the world. Moments of your personal prayer follow**…Amen**