The Contemplative way of the Carthusians

A very warm welcome to our Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate in the Centering Prayer tradition, beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We believe this practice leads us towards a more contemplative life.

Opening Prayer: Eternal God, through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word.1 May we seek and find You.3 Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self awareness.4 May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, stability, peace and justice making. Amen

Reflections: The monk, already by baptism dead to sin and consecrated to God, is by Profession still more totally dedicated to Blessed is the glory of the Lord, The Christ, Word of the Father, for all times men were chosen by the Holy Spirit to lead a life of solitude and to unite them in an intimate love. Answering this calling, Master Bruno, year of our Lord 1084, entered the desert of Chartreuse with six companions and began life there.

Born in Cologne around 1030, he begins studying at the school of the Cathedral of Reims at an early age. Made a "doctor", Canon of the Cathedral Chapter, he is made the Rector of the University in 1056. He was one of the most remarkable scholars and teacher of his time : “a prudent man whose word was rich in meaning.”

He finds himself less and less at ease in a city where scandal has little affect towards the clergy and the Bishop himself. After having fought, not without success, against this disorder, Bruno feels the desire of a life more completely given to God alone.

After an attempt at a solitary life of short duration, he enters the region of Grenoble, of which the Bishop, the future Saint Hugues, offers him a solitary site in the mountains of his diocese. In June 1084, the Bishop himself leads Bruno and six of his companions in the primitive valley of Chartreuse, where the Order eventually gets its name from. They build a hermitage, consisting of a few log cabins opening towards a gallery which allows them access to the communal areas of the community -- church, refectory, and chapter room -- without having to suffer too much from intemperate conditions.

After six years of a pleasant solitary life, Bruno is called by Pope Urban II to the service of the Holy See. Not thinking of being able to continue without him, his community first thinks of separating, but it allows itself to be convinced to follow in the life that he first formed. Advisor to the Pope, Bruno is ill at ease a the Pontifical Court. He only lives in Rome for a few short months. With the Pope's blessing, he establishes a new hermitage in the forests of Calabria, in the south of Italy, with a few new companions. There he dies 6 October 1101.

A witness from his brothers in Calabria :”Bruno deserves to be praised for many a thing, but especially in this matter: he was always a man of even temper, that was his specialty. His face was always joyful, and he was modest of tongue; he led with the authority of a father and the tenderness of a mother. No one found him too proud, but gentle like a lamb.”

The first rule : Guigues “Other hermitages were established imitating La Grande Chartreuse, and under the repeated insistence of Guiges, the fifth prior of Chartreuse, wrote a description of the way of life (The

"Customs", or Carthusian usage, around 1127); all adopted and decided to conform, for it became their law of observance and the link of charity of their emerging family." Statutes I.1

It was the same Guiges that rebuilt the hermitage on the actual grounds of La Grande Chartreuse, after an avalanche destroyed the first hermitage in 1132, killing 7 monks under the snow.

Contemplation: The only goal of the Carthusian way is CONTEMPLATION, by the power of the Spirit, living as unceasingly as possible in the light of the love of God for us, made manifest in Christ.

This implies a purity of heart, or charity : "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Mt 5:8)

Monastic tradition also calls this goal pure and continuous prayer.

All monastic life thus consists of this journey towards the heart and all the meaning of a monk's life is oriented towards this end. It helps the monk unite his life to charity, introducing it to the depths of his heart.

Truthfully, it is not this end which distinguishes Carthusians from other contemplative monks (Trappist, Benedictines, etc.), but the borrowed path, of which the essential characteristics are :

- the solitude
- a positive mixture of solitary and community life
- the carthusian liturgy

Solitude: "The primary application of our vocation is to give ourselves to the silence and solitude of the cell. It is holy ground, the area where God and his servant hold frequent conversations, as between friends. There, the soul often unites itself to the Word of God, bride to the groom, the earth to the sky, man to the divine."

Separation from the world is made possible by the cloister. Carthusian monks or nuns only leave the monastery for an occasional walk. They do no receive visits nor exercise any outside apostolate. They have neither radio nor television in the monastery. It is the prior who receive news and tell the monks what they need to know. As such the necessary conditions for internal silence develop, which then permit the soul to stay alert and attentive to the presence of God.

The Cell in a hermitage was arranged in such a manner as to assure the Carthusian a solitude as complete as possible, all the while giving him the necessities of life. Each cell consists of a two story building surrounded by a garden, where the monk lives alone for most of the day, for the duration of all his life.

This Life: Writing this homily I found myself considering whether I could consider such a life. The truth is that I enjoy the earthly comforts of this world too much: my family, my friends, my community, and of course my church life.

The cloister and cell only assure an external solitude. It is only the first step whose goal is to encourage interior solitude, or purity of heart: to keep one's soul away from any and all things not of God or which do not lead to God. It is at this level that the Carthusian meets the sudden impulses of his thought and the changes of his feelings. As long as the monk discusses with his "self", his sensibilities, his worthless thoughts, unreal desires, he is not centered on God. It is here that he experiences his weakness and the power of the Spirit which he learns bit by bit

Listening: " …the habit of the tranquil listening of the heart which allows God to enter by all path and access. » (Statutes 4.2)

A Carthusian community consists of cloistered monks, priests or those destined to become priests (Fathers) and monks converse or donate (Brothers). Cloistered monks live in the strictest of solitude. They do not leave their cells other than when allowed by the rule. They occupy their time with prayer, readings, and work (sawing wood to heat themselves during winter, gardening, transcribing, pottery, etc.) The Brothers ensure that the various needs of the monastery are met by their work outside of the cells (cooking, carpentry, laundry, work in the woods) It is a unique ideal, lived in two different ways. The Brothers work in as much

silence and solitude as possible. They have their share of life in the cell for reading and prayer, yet it is less demanding than the Fathers. That is why their cells are smaller. Both ways of life complement one another to form the unique Charterhouse and correspond to the different aptitudes of those who wish to lead a Carthusian life.

Within the group of Brothers, there are two categories, those called Converts (monks that take the exact same vows as the Fathers) and that of the Donates.

The Donates are monks who do not take the vows, but for love of Christ, give themselves to the Order by mutual agreement. They have their own set of customs which differs slightly than those of the Converts. For instance, their help during the Offices, most notable during the night Office, is not as strict. They live without owning anything. After seven years, they can fully enter the Order or renew their donation. Their gift to God is not any less than that of the other monks, as they tackle tasks and duties less compatible to the obligations of the Converts.

The nuns have of the same type of vocations under the name of Cloister Nuns, Converse Nuns and Donate Nuns.

Meditation: As we enter this time of meditation, let us consider the life of a Carthusian Monk or Nun. An entire life dedicated to speaking to, listening to and worshipping God. A life of sacrifice in the way of the desert fathers: There is always a Carthusian somewhere in the world praying for the world, for you and for me.

Beginning Meditation: Before beginning our meditation, you may wish to adjust your posture, you may wish to pay particular attention to the rhythm of your breath, taking a calming deep breath in through your nose, and a slow breath out, letting go fully. Then repeat this a few times. If you have a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps noticing your how your word is in time with the breath. Continues…

Bell Sounds: Continue into meditation…

Meditation for 25 minutes

Bell Sounds as meditation ends… Enjoy the stillness for a few moments… We continue in contemplation and prayer…

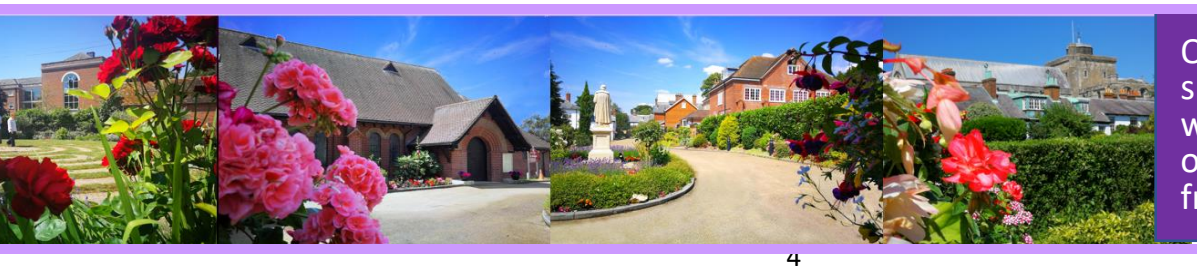
Closing Prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…Amen

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Afternotes (from Fiona)

HUGH OF BALMA'S DE THEOLOGIA MYSTICA (On Mystical Theology) our way to union with God "For just as the [Book of] Wisdom says that "Wisdom itself is the brilliance of the eternal light and is the mirror without blemish,"3 so it is necessary that there be an assimilative conformity when through the union of true love the human mind is united to the brilliance of the eternal light, so that with all obscuring mist removed beforehand from the mind, the mind is rendered like a mirror that is without blemish. Hence, it is first necessary that the mind be like a mirror without blemish; and forthwith it will be disposed toward receiving the quite divine bright rays of light. And in this way, the mind, after having been purified, will be made like Eternal Wisdom."

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