Reflection on: End of ~Ramadan Eid-al-Fitr 2021 and Inter religious dialogue– Sr Marie

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in our homes during this time of pandemic. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

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

Introduction:



Our Muslim brothers and sisters are now at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which this year runs from 13th April until 12th May. Ramadan recalls the month the Qur'an , the Muslim holy book, was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and is a month of fasting during which followers do not eat or drink during the hours of daylight. I would like to share with you the message of the president of the Vatican's Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to the Islamic Community on this occasion.[i]

"Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, we are glad to offer you our fraternal good wishes for a month rich in divine blessings and spiritual advancement. Fasting, along with prayer, almsgiving and other pious practices, brings us closer to God our Creator and to all those with whom we live and work, and helps us to continue walking together on the path of fraternity.

During these long months of suffering, anguish and sorrow, especially during the lockdown periods, we sensed our need for divine assistance, but also for expressions and gestures of fraternal solidarity: a telephone call, a message of support and comfort, a prayer, help in buying medicines or food, advice, and, to put it simply, the security of knowing that someone is always there for us in times of necessity. The divine assistance that we need and seek, especially in circumstances like those of the current pandemic, is manifold: God's mercy, pardon, providence and other spiritual and material gifts. Yet, what we need most in these times, is hope. At this time, then, we think it fitting to share with you some reflections on this virtue.

As we are aware, hope, while certainly including optimism, goes beyond it. While optimism is a human attitude, hope has its basis in something religious: God loves us, and therefore cares for us through his providence. He does this in his own mysterious ways, which are not always comprehensible to us. In these situations, we are like children who are certain of the loving care of their parents, but are not yet able to comprehend its full extent. Hope arises from our belief that all our problems and trials have a meaning, a value and a purpose, however difficult or impossible it may be for us to understand the reason for them or to find a way out of them. Hope also carries with it belief in the goodness present in the heart of every person. Many times, in situations of difficulty and despair, help, and the hope it brings, can come from those whom we least expect.



Human fraternity, in its numerous manifestations, thus becomes a source of hope for all, especially for those in any kind of need. Thanks be to God our Creator, and to our fellow men and women, for the quick response and generous solidarity shown by believers and also persons of good will with no religious affiliation in times of disaster, whether natural or human-made, like conflicts and wars. All these persons and their goodness remind us believers that the spirit of fraternity is universal, and that it transcends all boundaries: ethnic, religious, social and economic. In adopting this spirit, we imitate God, who looks benevolently upon the humanity he created, upon all other creatures and upon the entire universe. This is why the growing care and concern for the planet, our "common home", is, according to Pope Francis, yet another sign of hope.

We are also aware that hope has its enemies: lack of faith in God's love and care; loss of trust in our brothers and sisters; pessimism; despair and its opposite, unfounded presumption; unfair generalizations based on one's own negative experiences, and so forth. These harmful thoughts, attitudes and reactions must be effectively countered, so as to strengthen hope in God and trust in all our brothers and sisters. In his recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, (FT) Pope Francis speaks frequently of hope. There he tells us: "I invite everyone to renewed hope, 'for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile' (cf. Joy and Hopes, 1). Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope" FT 55.

We, Christians and Muslims, are called to be bearers of hope, for the present life and for the life to come, and to be witnesses, restorers and builders of this hope, especially for those experiencing difficulties and despair. As a sign of our spiritual fraternity, we assure you of our prayer, and we send best wishes for a peaceful and fruitful Ramadan, and for a joyful 'Id al-Fitr."

What is interreligious dialogue? Dialogue is **authentic, true interpersonal or intergroup relationships in love and freedom**. So interreligious dialogue will be two or more faith groups having authentic or real relationships in love and freedom. As Rob described in last week's meditation "the alchemy of communion".

It is the "I" – "you" which becomes the US of communion. It means *Me* relating in equality with *You*. It means my faith group relating in equality with your faith group. It is a way of being, of relating and a way of life involving the totality of my person/our group. I will continue with the idea of two persons in a relationship of loving dialogue which can read two groups in a relationship of love but for easier reading, I will use the former.

A person of dialogue is one who is able to listen with the heart as well as with the mind; is able to learn as well as to teach, to receive as well as to give; who can allow others to see me as I truly am and receive others as they truly are; who accepts the response of others, whatever it may be; who has deep convictions but also accepts the convictions of others; who does not have to be always right; who can take the responsibility for oneself; and who leaves others free and does not rob them of their opinions and feelings.

In dialogue: I accept myself and ask you to accept me…without conditions as someone different with: my background, convictions, special gifts, weaknesses and my masks. I believe in your sincerity, honesty, desire for truth, good. I accept you: without conditions, someone created by God different and whom I leave free to be different: in background, age, history, education, relationships; with your own set of convictions, priorities, assumptions; with your special gifts, sources of energy, potential, ways of communicating, making relationships, times for speaking, time for silences… space, your weaknesses, prejudices, wounds, feelings about the past, present, future, your masks and fears.

In dialogue I share: giving generously what I am, not just at the levels of ideas, spontaneously and freely responding to you, not trying to change you or make you become like me, realising the partiality of my truth, speaking the truth in love, in faith, trying to choose the appropriate moments, language, and gestures.

In dialogue, I listen: respecting what you say, leaving you space and freedom "not to say," trying to avoid judging, interpreting, solving, prying, valuing and encouraging, receiving with joy, your "truth."

In dialogue, I risk: my real self, losing my feelings of superiority, of inferiority, my masks changing, being misunderstood, understood, feeling rejected, on the margins, belonging, being loved, hearing God speak to me through you and allowing God to speak to you through me.

No one person knows everything. Everyone knows something. No one is so wise that s/he cannot learn from others. No one is so limited that s/he does not have some contribution to make to others.

There is a path of approach to the mind and heart of each person. If we take the trouble to find that unique path, the doors will be wide open for us. We need to be humble to approach each person in the way s/he needs to be approached. If you accept me wherever I am, all my energies and desires to grow will be set free. You will be telling me that it is O.K. to be where I am now. Then, I will have the courage to move on and to grow. Dialogue is an invitation of an open heart calling another heart to try, to trust, to open, to "be not afraid". Dialogue brings us face to face with truth in a relationship of love. When there is true dialogue, we open the way to the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Dialogue creates miracles as we discover the deep mystery of each other. By dialogue, we can let God into our world because in dialogue, we open ourselves to one another, and in doing this, we open ourselves to God. When we are open to others and to God, miracles have to happen. The true purpose of dialogue is to invite persons to become one with each other, to know the truth and to love God, others and themselves.

Faithfulness to the call of God is measured not so much in our belief but in our willingness to give ourselves to one another and to open to God working through us to one another. Dialogue has to become our way of life if there is to be true unity that will be on-going.

"*It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples."* (Jn 13:35)

WHAT HAPPENS IN DIALOGUE?

- There is a dynamism of love developing through relationship and tension between: **fullness and need**. In Fullness our experience is unique; I have something to give and have something to receive. No one has my own life experience and originality, my uniqueness is rich. In Need each one needs the vision and experiences of others. A vision lived by me alone would be lived poorly, I am much richer for having shared, my experiences become universal. I share my truth, you share yours and we will possess both**.**
- There is a dynamism of love developing through relationship and tension between: **Identity and difference.** In identity, I am original; nobody is like me or nobody is my duplicate. If somebody is very different, I need to find that we have something in common where I can identify myself with that person. This is the fruit of openness, listening, making space, empathising. This tension is also painful because when I accept the differences, I don't wipe out my own uniqueness and when I affirm my identity, I must not wipe out the differences. In Difference, I am different. I have something that you don't have. There are a Variety of gifts: 1 Cor. 12: 4 ff. Accepting the differences doesn't mean wiping out the identity.
- There is a dynamism of love developing through relationship and tension between: **Acceptance and struggle** If I accept differences and am absorbed by them, it is irresponsibility on my part. If I don't accept differences and try to absorb the other, it is wiping out the other. If I impose my ideas, you will struggle to be free and if I find myself giving in too easily to you, I struggle to be free.

Dialogue means accepting what is good and true in the other but remain true to myself. Some experience dialogue as a threat to their identity, therefore they need space and freedom. Dialogue progresses through overcoming conflicts. It is purified by them and leads to friendship. Dialogue moves by continually overcoming tensions and requires reconciliation and commitment.

Beginning Meditation:
As I come to meditate, I take a few moments to reflect on my mood. What has happened today, yesterday? Have I been able to feel the Lord's presence close to me, or has he seemed a long way away? Whatever I feel, I am here now, hoping to hear God speak to me through the words I have read. To help me be more receptive, I take a couple of deep breaths, then breathe normally. I may like to focus my attention on a favourite object, or perhaps a favourite refrain or perhaps the flickering of a candle, an image of communion….

25-minute meditation begins…

Post meditation: (unknown source)



The anthropologist invited the children from the African tribe to play one game. He placed a basket of fruit near the tree and announced, addressing the children: "The one of you who reaches the tree first will be rewarded with all sweet fruits." When he signaled to the children to start the race, they locked their hands tightly and ran together, and then they all sat together and enjoyed the delicious fruit.
The astonished anthropologist asked the children why they all ran together, because each of them could enjoy the fruit for himself. To which the children replied: "Obonato". Is it possible for one to be happy if everyone else is sad? "Obonato" in their language means: "I exist because we exist."

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…Take some time for your personal prayer …**Amen**

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

Resources: adapted from retreat on Dialogue, Service of Community Animation

Pixabay images

[i] https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-04/pontifical-council-interreligious-dialogue-ramadam-message.html



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