

Toronto Area Lenten Retreat Day *Being Healed and Guided During Lent*

The week before Palm Sunday, Toronto area meditators participated in a Lenten retreat day at St Basil's Church. They had the option of joining in any or all of three different activities over the day. The morning session, "Listening and Healing", was a Benedictine reflection led by Marilyn Metcalfe. At lunch, attendees met socially, while meditation group leaders joined a sharing circle. In the afternoon, a session entitled "The Psalms as a School of Lenten Prayer" was led by Joseph Clarkson. Over the day, about 50 meditators attended.

During the a.m. session, Marilyn reviewed some of the major emphases of Benedict's "Rule" – especially Benedict's advice to actively nurture our spiritual life through the daily disciplines of study, prayer and scripture. The meaning and purpose of the "Rule" is for us to learn to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. This in turn will lead us to love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor.

Marilyn asked, "Where do we find God?" Everywhere – if we watch and listen with the eyes and ears of the heart. We must take care not to drown out the Word that speaks to us, through our tendency towards selfish fixation. Marilyn cited John Main's remark that the meditation journey is a



Marilyn Metcalfe, Joseph Clarkson: Lent a time to expand our spirit.

limitless expansion of the spirit – one so marvelous that none can even guess what it entails!

Using the image of Jacob's ladder, Marilyn identified 12 steps, or degrees of humility, which can help us to open up, listen and be healed. These Benedictine lessons on spirituality and healing began with the emphasis that we need to go down in order to go up, that we need to acknowledge, accept and embrace our humanity, with all its flaws, in order to make any progress in spirituality. Wholeness of body, mind and spirit within a framework of humility is a truly human approach to learning to love God, neighbor and ourselves.

During the lunchtime sharing circle, group leaders gathered to discuss some of the challenges involved in taking responsibility for a regular meditation meeting. Some asked questions, or shared their difficulties. Others offered experience and advice. Everywhere the spirit of humility and fellowship flowed freely. Not one of us can claim perfection, but each of us has something to teach – if only we have the humility to be taught.

During the p.m. session, Joseph observed that the daily recitation of the Psalms has formed the backbone of the

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Paul Harris Gives a One-Day Retreat to Arnprior Meditators



Group Leaders Jean Anderchek (L) and Mary Sue McCarthy (R), with Fr. Jack Lau (C), Director of Galilee House, Arnprior

On Saturday, March 10, the two Christian Meditation groups in Arnprior, Ontario, gathered at St. John Chrysostom Church for a one-day retreat with Ottawa writer and spiritual leader Paul Harris. The day featured talks, DVDs, Q&As and two meditation periods.

Jean Anderchek opened the day with a warm welcome to Paul Harris, “whose public lecture started us off in Arnprior five and a half years ago!”

Paul started with a short presentation on “The Teaching

and the Practice”, and a WCCM DVD, *The Daily Practice*, featuring Laurence Freeman with meditators from around the world, sharing their experiences. Following the film, Paul spoke on “Some Important Aspects of the Teaching and Practice” – which included themes such as letting go, and hitting the wall. The morning continued with a meditation period and a Q&A.

After the afternoon meditation, Paul reflected on the way our prayer flows into action in our daily life and relationships. It is not during our meditation that there will be noticeable change, but gradually our hearts and actions will be transformed. Two lively DVDs followed – *Meditation Creates Community*, and *Silence in the City*, featuring young people’s groups in Australia.

Fr. Jack Lau, OMI Director of Galilee Centre in Arnprior, who is a member of the Arnprior Group, was a welcomed presence. Mary Sue McCarthy, who leads a group in her home, asked participants at the closing of the retreat to express what they felt were their personal highlights or special insights of the day. All agreed that a one-day retreat is extremely helpful in our small town community. It helps give us spiritual rejuvenation and a recommitment to our Christian Meditation prayer.

– Mary Sue McCarthy & Jean Anderchek

25 WCCM Benedictine Oblates meet in Montreal

On March 25, Benedictine Oblates from Ontario and Quebec met at the home of Polly and Mark Schofield in Montreal, for the feast of St Benedict. The day included a reading from the Rule, a meditation period, and discussions on aspects of monastic life, including the spiritual and human friendship between the twins, St Benedict and St Scholastica.

As Laurence Freeman has pointed out, WCCM Oblates make a commitment to the community of Christian Meditation as well as the Benedictine monastic community. Unlike most religious leaders, Benedict wrote only one rule, which can be lived by men and women, inside or outside the monastery, whatever their vocation.

John Main placed the tradition of Christian Meditation at the center of the monastic life of the contemplative community he founded in Montreal. “Today,” says Fr. Laurence, “the community formed around the world through meditation testifies to John Main’s vision that the contemplative experience creates community”.

Meditation takes us to the essence of the monastic identity: the single-minded search for God. For some meditators,



Benedictine Oblates attending a recent Oblate meeting in Montreal: include left to right: Darrell Taylor, Paul Harris, hostess Polly Schofield, Jim Mansfield, and Don Myrick.

the path of the Oblate offers, in a particularly personal way, a context and vision for their pilgrimage.

For information on WCCM Benedictine Oblates in Canada contact Polly Schofield at polly.schofield@gmail.com.

From the National Coordinator

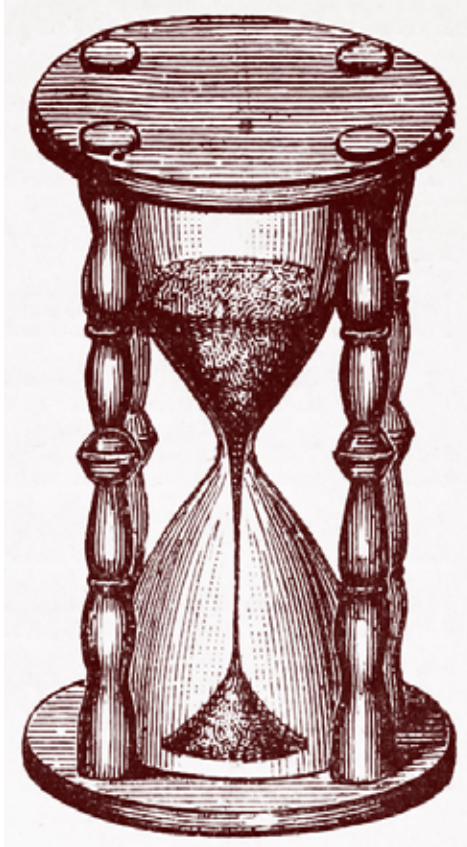
All the Time in the World

I had the pleasure of being with someone last week who had “all the time in the world.” She lives almost entirely in the present moment, fully alive and focused on what’s happening now. When I’m with her I become fully engaged in the energy of curiosity, problem solving, joy and wonder. Sometimes we share the pleasure of silence, as when we simply enjoyed the reflection of the moon on the water and the stars in the night sky. Her openness to life reveals God’s kingdom. She has a naturally contemplative nature, at one with herself and the world. She’s not quite three years old.

On the other hand, I noticed a young man in the supermarket who was so pressed for time that he was still wearing his pajama bottoms and talking on his cellphone while paying for his groceries. In the doctor’s office a woman was texting on her cellphone; a man on a street tripped as he walked and phoned, shouting his location into the ether. They were all trying to be connected and multi-task, but each was oblivious to the present moment. It was invisible to them. I’m sure none would claim to have “all the time in the world.”

In fact, wouldn’t most of us be embarrassed to claim that we “had all the time in the world”? In our current social milieu, a busy person is of value. Importance and worth are measured by the size of the “to do” list. The ego can feel that it is a badge of honour to feel stressed, overworked and

just too busy. Yet a recurring lament and entreaty is: “I just want some peace and quiet, I need some space, I need more time.” The present moment is for children and slackers. Or is it?



Sages and saints (that is, people not like us) say that all we have is the present moment. The past is over and the future is yet to come. In addition, they say that God is in the present moment, that the closer God is, the less there is to say. God is found in silence. To realize the present moment is to nurture that growing awareness of the nature of reality. It is simply who we are at our core, in relationship with God, through Jesus, in the Spirit, connected to all of Creation. John Main says, “In the superabundance of God’s love we become the person we are called to be.” Unfortunately this process is not available as a download from cyberspace.

The application we need is found in the daily practice and discipline of our meditation times. “... meditation is a way of coming to your own centre, the foundation of your own being, and remaining there – still, silent, attentive. Meditation is in essence a

way of learning to become awake, fully alive and yet still.” (John Main, OSB). It is there that we discover the present moment. It is there we have “all the time in the world” to gratefully bask in God’s love.

– Colleen Donald
National Coordinator

Canadian Christian Meditation Community National Resource Centre

(5964 ave. Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Suite 208
corner ave. Royal)

P.O. Box 52, Station NDG
Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P4
514-485-7928

christianmeditation@bellnet.ca
www.meditatio.ca

Editorial Team

Phil Barnett, Joseph Clarkson, Colleen Donald, Joy Gordon,
Mark Schofield and Jeff Ewener

Send submissions to newsletter coordinator Jeff Ewener
at <newsnotes@bellnet.ca>.

échos du silence, a newsletter for French-speaking meditators, is available.
Send inquiries to Fr. Michel Boyer, editor,
2715, chemin de la Côte Ste-Catherine, Montréal H3T 1B6
or email <info@meditationchretienne.ca>.

Page design: www.khatvanga.com

A Desert Hermit in a High-Rise Apartment

The desert has always had a special meaning for those on the spiritual path – the place where spiritual seekers retreated to find solitude, silence, stillness and closeness to God. The angels ministered to Jesus in the desert, St. Paul spent time there, and beginning in the third century, men and women flocked to the deserts of Egypt to become hermits and live in monastic communities. The desert became the training ground for the contemplative spiritual path.

Two thousand years later, 21st-century contemplatives are often found in high-rise apartment buildings. They seek God in the inner desert of the heart. One of these in Ottawa is Mel Maraj, a 75-year-old native of Trinidad and Tobago who, though suffering a disability for many years, has become a modern high-rise hermit.

I met Mel nearly 16 years ago, when he was recuperating from a stroke. One evening, with great difficulty, he made his one and only visit to a meeting of St Patrick's Christian meditation group. It was a remarkable moment: "On first listening to a John Main talk and experiencing the silence of the group members," he says, "I knew immediately this was to be my spiritual path for the rest of my life." Today Mel meditates in four half-hour periods daily – 3:00 am, 5:00 am, 12:00 noon, 5:00 pm.

I recently sat down with Mel to talk about his modern-day desert experience.

Paul: Mel do you follow John Main's teaching and the use of the word Maranatha?

Mel: Yes. Unfortunately because of health reasons I cannot attend group meetings, but I listen to John Main's talks, and follow his daily readings book. I am a voracious reader of spirituality and keep up with spiritual authors like Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Morton Kelsey, Thomas Merton and others. However the reading of scripture gets the highest priority, since contemplative spirituality is rooted and anchored in the word of God.

Paul: Have you a favorite book?

Mel: Yes. Undoubtedly it is *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, by the late William Johnston. John Main intro-

duced me to the anonymous 14th-century English author of *The Cloud*. In Johnston's book, he delves deeply into *The Cloud of Unknowing* and re-emphasizes our need to go beyond all images and concepts of the divinity. He also elaborates on the "arrows of love", aimed towards God in contemplative prayer – which of course also refer to the mantra and our daily times of meditation. He reminds us that God is not a concept – he cannot be thought, but he may be known by love.

Paul: What about Thomas Merton and the subject of the desert and hermits?

Mel: In many ways Merton is the patron saint of hermits and the desert experience. I love this quote of his, about the desert and the practice of prayer: "The prospect of this wilderness is something that so appalls most people. They cannot believe that contemplation and sanctity are to be found in a desolation where there is no food, and no shelter, and no refreshment for their imagination and intellect and the desires of their nature".

But Isaiah balances Merton by saying:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

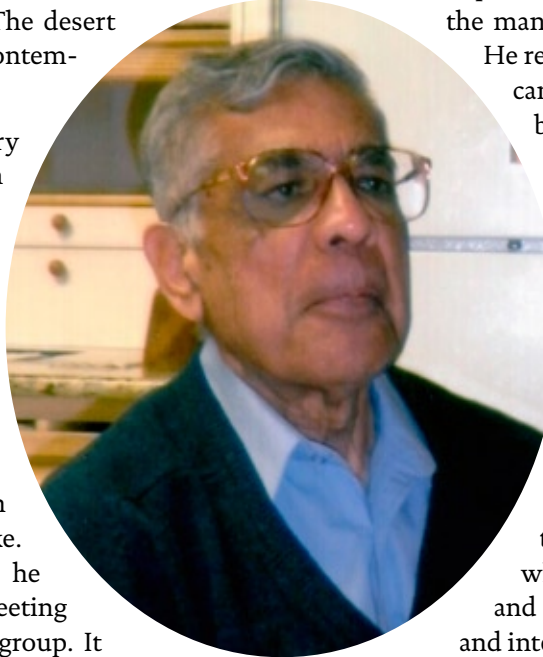
**High-Rise Hermit
Mel Maraj: "In the end we
will be judged on love,
and we must not judge
our spiritual journey by
materialistic standards."**

Paul: You meditate four times a day, a total of about two hours. What should we learn from your example?

Mel: Yes. I am able to do this because the life style of the hermitage allows me the time and freedom for this daily prayer discipline. However I am in agreement with John Main, that for most modern-day people, with family and community responsibilities, two periods of meditation – one in the morning and one in the evening – are quite sufficient. Each person must decide about this in the

light of the circumstances of their own life. Remember: in the end we will be judged on love, and we must not judge our spiritual journey by materialistic standards. I would also like to mention that the daily practice of meditation has been a great gift and support in my living with the disability of a stroke.

– Paul Harris



Calendar of Events

For regular updates go to www.meditatio.ca/News/updates.html

Montreal

18-20 May: Silent retreat for Benedictine Oblates and meditators, with talks based on the unpublished writings of Fr. John Main. Presented by Polly Schofield. Cistercian Monastery at Rougemont, Quebec. \$150 room with bath, \$110 shared bathroom. For registration call Magda Jass – 514-489-0998 – magda.jass@gmail.com

Ottawa

24 May: Reception for Fr Laurence Freeman's Investiture. A date has finally been set for Fr Laurence Freeman's investiture into the Order of Canada: **Friday 25 May.** To celebrate this occasion, the Ottawa Christian Meditation community is hosting a reception on Thursday evening, 24 May, from 7 to 9 pm at St Bartholomew's Anglican Church, 125 Mackay Street, Ottawa.

As Paul Harris wrote back in 2009, "On Canada Day, July 1, the Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, announced the honorary appointment of Fr Laurence Freeman as an officer of the Order of Canada. He is cited for his contributions as the spiritual leader and director of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), and as a proponent of peace, inter-religious dialogue and understanding.

"Laurence Freeman also accepts it, not so much as a personal honour, but as recognition of the core principles of the WCCM – of the world-wide hunger for a spiritual renewal in contemplative prayer, of the need for meditation practice in the current world of chaos, noise and violence, and of the reality that each person is created for a unique destiny and a unique fulfillment in God. Fr Laurence has observed that this honour reflects powerfully on Canada's breadth of vision and wisdom, in recognizing the spiritual dimension of the global issues of our time."

Saturday, 26 May: *Cultivating Forgiveness in the Present Moment* – a day of reflection and fellowship sponsored by the Ottawa Area Christian Meditation Community. 10 a.m to 2 p.m. Our Lady of Fatima Parish, 153 Woodroffe Ave., Ottawa, ON. Guest speaker Marilyn Metcalfe, Ontario Regional Coordinator, Canadian Christian Meditation Community. Registration and information: Eva Hegman

Want to list an event? You will find a user-friendly form to submit additions at www.meditatio.ca/Forms/events.html.

Being In, But Not Of, This World

In March, the Toronto Meditation Community's Knox College monthly speaker series featured a talk by Kathleen Russell on the topic of "being in, but not of, this world."

In John 17, immediately before his arrest, Christ prays for his followers, not to be taken out of the world, but for God's protection while they are in it. "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world."

Paul echoes this sense of crisis. Let those who mourn act "as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing." [1 Cor 7]

Kathleen told the audience of about two dozen, "I believe this is the essence of the spiritual practice of a meditator." Even the contents of our own egos constitute, for the most part, fragments of the world that have clung to us as we pass.

613-596-9480 – evahegmann@gmail.com

Kingston

10-12 November, 2012: Fully Alive – Retreat to be held at the Providence Centre, 1200 Princess Street. Led by Lucie Legault (Casey will be on sabbatical).

For registration or information, contact Lucie Legault: 819-827-1278 – legault.smeltzer@videotron.ca

Toronto

Knox College Thursdays: Monthly Teaching Meetings

- May 31: Rev. Glenda Meakin, "It Is the Nature of Love ..."
- June 21 (note early date): Carolyn Murray, "Bede Griffiths: The Monk with a Universal Heart" (followed by Annual Satsang)

Location: Monthly teaching meetings will be in Room #4, Knox College, 59 St. George Street, University of Toronto (St. George Campus) – 7-9 p.m. Contacts: – Maureen Casey Rowed – 416-733-0233 – myetmoe@hotmail.com or Joy Gordon – 416-485-9718.

8-10 June: Weekend Retreat: "The Journey of the Beloved: Healing Our Identity in God" St. John's Convent – 223 Cummer Avenue, Toronto. To register call Noli: 647-286-3041 – nolibee@rogers.com

Calgary

Monthly Booster: Meditation "Drop-In" Thursdays, 7-8 pm on May 10 and June 7. Sessions are offered at the FCJ Christian Life Centre, 219-19th Ave. SW, Calgary, Alberta. 403-228-4215 – fcjcentre@fcjsisters.ca – www.fcjsisters.ca/fcjcentre

Edmonton

Coming up in 2013! Save the Date!

8-10 March 2013 – School of Meditation: The Essential Teaching. Cost: \$195 for accommodations, meals and all materials. Location: Star of the North Centre, St Albert. Contacts: Monique Eng: moniqueeng@hotmail.com, Mia Klein-Gebbinck: miklge@telus.net – 780-354-2108.

Expanding on this reflection, she recalled a talk by Laurence Freeman, in which he said that "it's useful to focus our minds on the gaps between things – in particular, on the gaps between our repetitions of the mantra."

This point evoked a lively discussion. One person recalled conductor Daniel Barenboim saying something similar about the nature of music: "It does not exist by itself, but only in a constant and unavoidable relation with silence."

As Kathleen concluded, though we often focus on the "not of this world" part of the phrase, we must remember that we certainly live "in this world." The secret is to do so while rooted in that other world, the one we can access never by thought, but only by love itself.



“Seek ye first...”

MEDITATION AND THE PARABLES

Julie Meakin: “Both parables and meditation reveal a new reality.”

Connections between the parables and Christian Meditation can help us to understand both meditation and Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God. Julie Meakin reflected upon the parables in general as well as delving into specific parables when she spoke at the monthly teaching meeting of the Toronto Christian Meditation Community on Feb. 23, at Knox College.

In the first place, the parables are simple, usually 2 or 3 to 10 verses long – the story of the prodigal son is the longest, at 22 verses. They are concise, containing all that is necessary for the teaching. Our meditation practice is also simple. The mantra, *ma-ra-na-tha*, is only four syllables. We sit down, and say our mantra from the beginning to the end of our meditation period. That’s about it.

Secondly, beneath the simplicity of both the parables and our meditation practice there lies a rich treasure. When we are committed to our twice-daily meditation and when we are open to Jesus’ teachings in Scripture, the treasure of the Kingdom becomes more and more a reality in our lives, both within us and in our relationships.

Thirdly, while it may appear that “nothing is happening”, we come to both the parables and our meditation with faith – with trust that God is working beneath the surface. In the parables language works against the hearer’s expectations – we don’t expect the Kingdom of God to be symbolized by a weed, as in the parable of the mustard seed. So too in meditation, the simplicity of the mantra works against our expectation that spiritual practice needs to be complicated in order to be effective. We must come to both meditation and the parables with open hearts, minds, and wills.

Both reveal a new reality. The parables often use metaphor and challenge our expectations. A simple commonplace detail becomes part of a new understanding of reality – the

despised Samaritan models the Kingdom; God’s generosity trumps humans’ sense of fairness in the Labourers in the Vineyard. In meditation, a new reality – or better, the reality – is revealed to us through the experience of silence, stillness, and simplicity. Reality is that God is the center of all. Our prevailing notion, that our ego is the centre, is an illusion.

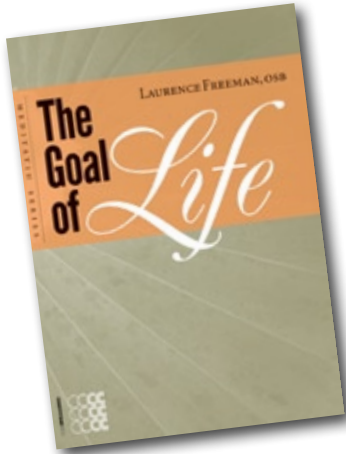
Finally both the parables and our meditation are multi-layered – they are journeys of discovery, like the Gospel, “ever ancient, ever new” as St. Augustine puts it. We can never get bored by mining the depths of Jesus’ teachings nor by mining the depths of our own hearts. The Kingdom of God is something that is both familiar and mysterious.

Julie also spent some time with specific parables, to “mine” the teachings about the kingdom and to discover parallels in the treasure of Christian Meditation. My favourite was the parable of the Sower and the Seeds, where she cited Fr. Laurence’s reflection that the birds which come and steal the seeds are like distractions, which can “steal” our mantra right from the very beginning of our meditation session. Other times, when we repeat our mantra it can feel rather automatic because our hearts are “stony.” Still other times, we can begin paying attention to the mantra but then our worries, “the thistles”, choke out the silence.

However, if we persist, we also experience the seed falling on good soil – our meditation seems more peaceful and we enter into silence and stillness more deeply. We hope that all of meditation times will be like this – but in reality we know that this is not the case. And that is perfectly natural, says Fr. Laurence for when we come to the practice with humility and faith, the seed is always falling into good soil. We must learn to embrace the whole experience – to accept whatever is happening as part of the journey.

– Joseph Clarkson, Toronto

PUBLICATIONS



THE GOAL OF LIFE LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB 80 PAGES \$14

Father Laurence Freeman shares insights into understanding Jesus in order to better understand ourselves. He teaches that the goal of life is to know fully who we are, and that self-transcendence is the way to self-knowledge. In this state, the centre of consciousness no longer resides in the ego. Individual identity is not lost but it is transcended. The practice of meditation harmonizes and integrates in the spirit all that we think and feel and say and do.

EXPERIENCING GOD REV. SARAH BACHELARD 120 PAGES \$15

There are critical times in our lives, moments of profound loss, grief and fear in which our frameworks of sense seem to collapse and no longer enable us to convey meaning to overwhelming events or even to life itself. In this work Sarah Bachelard suggests that the practice of meditation and contemplative living may help us endure and integrate such turning-point experiences, and bring our life and identity into a deeper wholeness.



FRUITS OF CRISIS LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB 6 CDS \$42

These are recordings of the talks given by Laurence Freeman OSB at the pre-John Main Seminar Retreat at the University of Cork in 2011.

For information on other new titles please see page 12 in the international section.

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Toronto Lenten Retreat *continued from front*

daily Judeo-Christian prayer practice for over two thousand years. The Psalms were part of the prayer life of Christ, and have guided the spirituality of religious and laity since the time of St. Benedict. We can look at the Psalms as both a “Path of Prayer” and a “School of Prayer.” Participants joined in *Lectio* with the Psalms, as well as in singing and reciting them.

A lot of time was spent with Psalm 1, an introduction that calls us to choose between two ways of living. We can choose the path of worldly counsel or the path of wisdom. The consequences of each are explored in vivid imagery. The two paths exist in our lives and even within our own being. The way of the Lord brings peace and joy, while the path of worldly counsel leads to ruin. Ultimately, being conformed to the “ways” or “paths” or “laws” of the Lord is the only way to experience true happiness, peace and joy.

We discussed the prayer genres of praise, thanksgiving, petition and lament, recalling the insights of Thomas Merton:

“When one becomes conscious of who God really is, and when one realizes that He who is Almighty, and infinitely Holy, has ‘done great things to us,’ the only possible reaction is the cry of half-articulate exultation that bursts from the depths of our being in amazement at the tremendous, inexplicable goodness of God to mankind. The Psalms are all made up of such cries – cries of wonder, exultation, anguish or joy.”

(Praying the Psalms, 1956, p. 6).

Praising God in prayer is not a matter of meeting God’s needs. We praise God because it dethrones our ego, and puts us into right relationship with God.

Directing lamentation towards God is appropriate in times of crisis, suffering and difficulty. Even in times of utter darkness, our lament is an affirmation of faith, hope and trust at a time that seems to beg for despair. Contrary to worldly wisdom, affliction is not a sign of being abandoned by God for “he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted, he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried for help” (Psalm 22:24).

Lament is an honest prayer at a time of suffering and sorrow. As Cynthia Bourgeault says, the Psalms provide “a safe spiritual container within which to recognize and process those dark shadows of anger, rage, feelings of abandonment, helplessness and sheer terror, within a larger context that can provide hope and meaning to our individual experiences.”

The Psalms run the gamut of human experience, from the heights of exaltation to the depths of desolation, expressing the fullness of an authentic spirituality. They help us express who we truly are. Living today, in a society that creates so many false needs and desires, we need to pray with the Psalmist: “as the deer longs for running water, so my soul longs for you, my God” (Psalm 42:1). The Psalms help us to know and to pray according to the truest, deepest yearnings of the heart, soul and mind.

– Joseph Clarkson, Toronto

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Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P4

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