



The Anchorage
A Contemplative Ministry

Come away...

DEPTH SOUNDINGS

Encouragement, Inspiration and News from The Anchorage

February 2010



"I am the vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant." John 15:5 The Message

The Unitive Way



*anchor
deep*

“Everyone Can Experience Intimacy with God”

By Cathie Powell

Our “Depth Soundings” theme for this year is a brief introduction to The Classic Three Ways. In our August issue, we focused on the Purgative Way, the beginning of the journey deeper into God’s love. The Purgative Way is a time of shedding, and often comes after an awakening to God’s love. We are encouraged to hold lightly instead of tightly, very contrary to our nature, at least to my nature. It is often painful and difficult as we learn to let go some more in this culture that says grab all you can get.

In our November issue we described the Illuminative Way, saying it includes a visceral response to the love of God given so freely, but that many resist because the price of change is too high. If one has great courage, and moves into the Illuminative Way, reverence and awe grow in the inner life, and the soul is revealed as the inner place where the Trinity resides in glory. A silence and calm envelop the individual, reflected mostly in prayer, the prayer of quiet, as listening brings more answers than speaking.

So as we consider the Unitive Way, the third and final ‘way’ of the Classic Three Ways, we are faced again with the dilemma, are we willing to give up what is known for the unknown, entering ever deeper into the mystery of God’s love.

It is important to attempt to put some words around the Unitive Way, as it moves us to the depth of the spiritual journey. The Unitive Way is experienced more than explained, described more than defined. Put most simply, it is the union of the Creator with the creature, not the meshing or mixing of essences as much as the joining of wills. The prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane comes to mind, as he said, “nevertheless, not my will but yours” (Matthew 26:39).

Reading several sources about the Unitive Way, I noticed that each one says more than once, that this way is difficult to define, then proceeds to try to do so for over a hundred pages. Here’s one example from Benedict Groeschel, a contemporary Catholic theologian.

“A short summary of the Unitive Way is not possible.

Words fail and thoughts evaporate as one attempts to describe the experience of union with God which comes to the very few who arrive at this way of infused contemplation. Without being spectacular, the Unitive Way is also totally absorbing, like love’s quiet joy. Yet when one encounters the Unitive Way in its most common form, among the elderly who live lives of peaceful gratitude to God, it seems to be a simple childlike hymn of praise. In all cases, it is a movement whose source is beyond all human origin or limitation.”

It is evident that Groeschel’s work is formed by Dionysius’ thought, as he says that only a very few are privileged to experience it. That may be more because of our resistance than because of God’s gifting. It continues to be my experience that God delights to invite each of us, every man and woman, and yes, even children to this experience of oneness, of union, if we would but come!

A book by Susan Muto, *Where Lovers Meet: Inside the Interior Castle*, highlights the thoughts of Teresa of Avila, a spunky 16th century Spanish mystic. Notice how very tender God is in this process.

“Each degree of grace leads her soul further into the heart of pure love. Soul, psyche, and spirit enjoy the fruits of intimacy: companionship and lifelong fidelity to the Lord. Her “I” now becomes the “I” of Christ living in her. The movement is at once inward and upward, linear and circular. God’s agenda for grace unfolds not by force but by tender accommodation to the true self that she is and was meant to be.”

We are reminded of Paul’s words, “No longer I but Christ who lives within me.” (Gal. 2:20) These words are for everyone – not just a special few.

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The Anchorage

Vision

For all people everywhere to see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly. For when just one person moves toward living out of that graced space, where we know we are loved, there is a ripple effect which is our best hope for the healing of our world. The Anchorage wants to contribute to that hope.

Mission

The Anchorage provides a setting in which women and men may come away to be with God, as revealed in Jesus the Christ; and to come to love more deeply, through contemplative retreats, book studies, and spiritual direction this God who loves us beyond measure.

Metaphor

A safe harbor in which to anchor deep in still waters as a respite from the wind and waves; where pilgrims may enjoy prayerful grace, honor the rhythm of Sabbath and open more fully to the mystery of God’s love.

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“The Lights Went Out, but the Monks Kept on Singing”

By Martha Ebel

The early Celts believed that there are in this world what they called “thin places,” that is sacred spots where the earthly world and the divine world seem very close to one another. In a “thin place” the veil between this world and the next is so sheer that we actually encounter God, experience God’s presence, hear God speak. Do you know a place like this? Last November I went on a directed seven day group retreat with The Anchorage to Mepkin Abbey, and it was there that I found my “thin place.”

One rainy night at Mepkin as we were sitting in the choir with the monks, singing the Psalms and the prayers, the rain became so torrential that the lights went off in the church. Suddenly we were in total darkness. I could not see my hand before my face. I felt some anxiety and wondered what we would do. I figured that Compline must be over. I knew that I could not find my way out of the church, back to our house or anywhere else. I stopped singing—of course—because I could not see the words in the worship book. Suddenly I noticed that even in the darkness, the monks did not stop singing. They never missed a word. With or without the guests, the Psalms and the prayers went on as usual. After a few minutes, the emergency generator in the church roared to life, the lights came back on, and the service ended in its usual way. The silence was never broken. The fact that the monks kept on singing in the dark has stayed with me since my week at Mepkin Abbey last fall. How could they keep on singing in the darkness without stopping to regroup? without giving directions and reminding everybody that the generator was in place and would come on shortly? without a pause or a stutter?

I think this is rooted in the solitude, silence and prayer of the monastic community. And I am reminded of the words of Sister Wendy Beckett, “Silence is a paradox...a condition of surrender...and we learn not to care for what is insignificant.” The silence of the monks permeates their very being. They, so much better than I, live in the knowledge that “Behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (even in the rain and the darkness!)

I’ve got a lot to learn and am looking forward to my next week at Mepkin in November 2010.

(Thanks to Martha for this article and for her participation with The Anchorage. She is a retired Presbyterian minister, living in Aiken, SC. She volunteers as a hospice chaplain. Martha and her husband Paul enjoy time together and with their children and grandchildren.)

(Cont.d from page 2)

Perhaps a story of St. Therese of Liseaux, a 19th century French Carmelite, can help us see more clearly. A sister brought her a thimble and a tumbler – and filled them both asking which one was more full. She replied that both were filled to their capacity. The wise sister said, “so it is with God’s grace. Our spiritual life may lead us to “thimblehood” or “tumblerhood.” God loves us to the fullness of our capacity to receive God’s love.”

When we are willing to remain in God’s love, to yield, to surrender, to be the branch trusting the vine, God, as fully as possible, God stretches us to make room for God’s very self. Hear God inviting you, “Make your home in my love.” (John 15:5, *The Message*)

Though the three steps in The Classic Three Ways usually occur in this order, they are cyclical, repeated often throughout our lives providing each of us ample invitations to let go some more, to see, to know and to love. We will go into this in more detail in our next issue about the “Plus One” the Way that is added to complete the process.

**“God loves us to
the fullness of our
capacity to receive
God’s love.”**



Upcoming Events

1st Fridays, 9:30 – 3:30 “Clergy Quiet Day Series”

(You may substitute our Spring Quiet Day, April 16 for our Clergy Quiet Day on April 2, Good Friday.)

Fri., Feb. 26 – Sun., Feb. 28 “Tending the Soul: A

Retreat for Artists and Mystics” Snails Pace,

Led by Cathie Powell/Ashlyn Mengel

Thurs., Mar. 4–30, 12–1:30 “Our Relationship with Money: A Lenten Study at Lunch”

Led by Robert Miles

Fri., Apr. 16, 9:30 – 3:30 “Listening with the Ears of Our Hearts: A Spring Quiet Day”

Led by Mike Flanagan

Thurs., May 20, 6:30 – 8:30 “Spring Caregivers Dinner: Precious Lord, Take My Hand”

1st UMC, Easley
Led by Peggy Dulaney

Fri., May 21 – Sat., May 22 “Deeper into the Silence of God” The Oratory

Led by Martin Laird

Probable Dates for our '10 - '11 booklet:

Fri, Aug. 28 – Sat., Aug. 29 “Listening to Oneself, Others and God”

Led by Patty Levering, Quaker
Location TBA (probably NC
mntns.)

November 1 – 8 7-day Fall Directed Retreat

at Mepkin Abbey
Led by Peggy Walsh

Beach Retreat, Jan. 21 – 23

Led by Sr. Caroline Smith

Praying the Hours, Jan. 23 – 25

Led by Cathie Powell

All events are at The Anchorage unless noted. To reserve your space, send \$10 payable to The Anchorage.

