

# REFLECTIONS ON MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

## Definition of Spirituality

To me, spirituality and spiritual practices, like meditation, are how we “go backstage” to recharge our spiritual energy to re-engage with the world. It is not adequately described as building up my private relationship with God: a 'Jesus and I' mentality.. It does not consists in becoming more and more responsible in the fulfillment of a duty, but rather in becoming more and more faithful in a love relationship. Spirituality is primarily about the heart and its activities, not the mind and its creations.

To me it also means *living faith*, with 'living' being both an adjective and a verb. Spirituality is the practical living out of who we are and who we're called to be.”

One definition that I have recently come across that resonates with me is the ordering of our lives in such a way that the Holy Spirit has a chance.

## My Spiritual Practice

At the end of the Winter Term, my spiritual practice consisted of the following:

### ***Meditation***

#### **Mantra**

My goal was to practice mantra meditation twice a day, for 30 minutes each time, at sunrise and sunset; which I did manage to do most of the time, even if meditation was practiced on the subway to and from school – which it was some of the time. My practice was sustained and supported through weekly attendance at the Christian Meditation Group meeting at St. Thomas's Church.

#### **Rosary**

At other times during the day – particularly in times of high stress – I would say the Rosary, which for me is a form of meditation. I found this to be a particularly

useful calming exercise prior to writing exams. The Rosary has become a very special thing to me. I am seldom without it, and find comfort just in knowing it is there if I need it.

### ***Daily Office***

As the term began, it was my intention to attend Chapel Services daily, as had been my nearly invariable custom during the previous two years. On those days, the services I attend take the place of my saying the Office privately. When for some reason I do not attend Chapel at Trinity College, I use the following resources for the Office.

- **Cotter**

I was introduced to Jim Cotter's *Prayer at Day's Dawning*, and *Prayer at Night's Approaching* almost two years ago; and have since used them as my private version of the Office on days I did not attend Chapel.

- **Breviary**

I acquired a *Short Breviary* at a church book sale this fall, and have since used it to pray the canonical hours; using it to fill in the gaps between Chapel services and in the evening, insofar as it is possible to do. I had stayed at St. Margaret's Convent, Sri Lanka, for a week in the summer and had been exposed so such a cycle there. I found it added a great deal to my spiritual life and had been trying to do something on my own since that time. The discovery of the Breviary was, in a very real sense for me, an answer to prayer.

- **St Thomas's Church**

On Friday's I officiate at Evening Prayer at St. Thomas's Church; after which I serve the Low Mass in the Lady Chapel.

### ***Reflection***

#### **SOP**

The School of Philosophy teaches a process they call reflection, which is very like *Lectio Divina*. I have attempted to transfer that process into my Christian spiritual reading.

#### **Online Retreat**

About a year and a half ago I “discovered” a website from Creighton University called *The Online Retreat in Daily Life*, which is a form of the Ignatian exercises designed for a 34 week period from mid September to Pentecost. I have been in the practice of doing these exercises on a weekly basis, usually before or after the evening meditation on Saturday or Sunday.

### ***Experience***

When I began this term, my spiritual practice was somewhat sporadic. I had just returned from Sri Lanka which is usually like a retreat for me. There, I lead chapel services with the children at the Paynter Home, in English, every second day – the other days are Sinhala and Tamil prayer led by another staff member. I have also been in the practice of meditating before Morning Prayer with a period of reflection following it. Evening meditation at 6:00 pm – sundown – is the goal, but is somewhat more difficult to establish regularly because of the demands of being in loco parentis on the property. Invariably, it seems, evening meditation is interrupted by an “emergency” involving one or more of the children, the arrival of some visitor or group of them, or some other problem the staff feel they cannot handle on their own.

This time, however, I had been ill with some sort of debilitating respiratory virus that just would not go away, and had actually been in bed for much of the three weeks or so prior to returning to Canada. During that period my practice routines suffered. They were not firmly re-established before the commencement of term.

For much of this term, I have felt somewhat out of control since I have found it difficult to retain the practices I was already doing while simultaneously attempting to experience new ones.

### **The Experience during Term**

#### ***Labyrinth***

The expectations I had of this exercise were that I would experience some transformation or another - a transporting into a holy realm; particularly after listening to the way it was described by the presenter.

I cannot say that I had the same experience he described. Instead, I on the inbound route, found myself saying the Rosary and that, for me, transformed the practice. On the outbound route I said the meditation mantra with similar results.

The thought was that it may be a useful venue for reflection or walking meditation by providing a structure and discipline to enhance its practice, but in and of itself, without incorporating other practices it was not life changing for me.

Perhaps my experience of it was coloured by expectations that were too high. Perhaps it is like eating olives - it is an acquired taste. It certainly deserves to be attempted several more times before drawing any definitive conclusion - and it needs some clarification about what one should experience in and through the process.

#### ***Healing***

I believe in healing. I have had the experience of being anointed; indeed at St. Crispin's, Scarborough, the Rev. Kim Beard used to do anointing during the Eucharist once a month. Virtually the whole congregation received it.

I have also seen its power working in others.

Last Spring when my father was in intensive care after an operation during which he suffered a massive heart attack, we, as a family requested anointing for him. When the priest came, he was comatose and waxen. Indeed it looked as if

his spirit had already departed from his body. He did, however, surface just long enough to blink in assent to receiving the anointing. By the next day he was sitting up in a chair. He had pulled out all of the various tubes connected to him during the night, because he was determined not to be in bed on his wedding anniversary. He subsequently recovered enough to come home and return to his regular daily activities. Although he did die in the summer of that year, due to another heart attack, he did so doing what he wanted to do – out cutting the grass on the hottest day of the year. He simply came into the house and sat down and died. Our last memory of him was as a vital human being, not an invalid lying in a hospital connected to bottles and tubes.

The experience of healing as prayer combined with the laying on of hands is also something I have practiced with my wife, who has glaucoma. We thought it couldn't do any harm, and it certainly did provide comfort for her. The pressure in her eye has also decreased! Something certainly seems to have happened. We choose to believe it was the prayer rather than the medication; since her pressure was increasing before we began this practice.

I found the experience in class to be somewhat uncomfortable, however; likely because it was "staged" and not real. Also, I am shy in front of a group.

### **Art**

I was expecting a different experience than what was presented in the session on art. Frankly, I thought there would be more about meditating using a piece of religious art as the focus. I also thought there would be more Fine Art appreciation; particularly when I saw the slide projector. I found the oral presentation to be somewhat convoluted and confusing. Moreover, I did not expect to be creating a picture; particularly not being limited to just a few shapes to express my thoughts about a number of spiritual themes.

Once I stepped over my discomfort, I actually enjoyed the exercise. Art is one of the 'hobbies' I have placed on the back-burner for quite some time; intending to get back to it at some point one day when I have more time. I have all the necessary equipment, but seldom use it. Moreover, my wife is an artist and has

exhibited professionally. Perhaps that is why I have avoided picking up a sketch pad again, to avoid comparisons; and to avoid usurping her field.

I do not know whether I will practice art as a spiritual exercise; but I do know it is a relaxing and contemplative practice. It is just a matter of the subject matter one chooses, and the attitude one brings to the work, I suppose. Perhaps one day ...

### ***Rosary***

I found the session on the Anglican Rosary somewhat disconcerting at first. I guess I was disappointed; because I had expected the “Roman Catholic” Rosary and the traditional Hail Mary prayers.

I have been praying the Rosary for about a year and a half now, and am a member of the Society of Mary. I find it to be incredibly comforting; particularly when I am under any degree of stress; and am seldom without it. In some way, initially, the Anglican Rosary “threatened” something I hold near and dear. Once I identified what was happening I was able to let go of my disappointment and participate fully in the exercise of making and praying the Rosary the Anglican way.

If I had not already “discovered” the Roman Rosary it is quite likely that I would have taken to the Anglican one. It was an interesting experience, and I do see the point of being able to pray it with whatever prayer one chooses to use. For me, however, the Roman Rosary and the Hail Mary is still my preference. To me the Hail Mary is like a mantra, and serves the same purpose of distracting the discursive mind so that the attention can rest on God.

### ***Meditation***

Since I gave the seminar on Meditation, I will not comment on it here; except to say that my “desire”, if you will, of sharing my experience of it with the class has been satisfied, and it is my hope that some, at least, will find it to be of value, as I have.

### ***Journaling***

Although I kept an “electronic” journal for the purposes of this course, it is not high on my list of spiritual practices for reasons I discussed in class. I am afraid that in this area I am still a product of my personal experience going through a divorce, and the teaching of the School of Philosophy. Letting the attention rest on the past, and mulling it over is not something that is useful for me. The School of Philosophy called it “sifting through garbage”. I find it is better for me to dedicate my activities to God as they begin, and to rededicate them after a break or when I become distracted, and at the end to give the fruits – whatever they happened to be – back to the creator. For me that works.

I do recognize that for some journalling is useful. I do keep records, and business diaries. But I am resistant to keeping a spiritual journey. I will commit to pray about it and to revisit it for time to time.

### ***The Readings***

I have very much enjoyed the readings, and being exposed to such a variety of different different spiritual practices. I do have to say that my personal favourites remain John Main, Thomas a Kempis and Brother Lawrence; all of whom I was familiar with before the start of the course. I particularly appreciated the exposure to John Cassian, who I have not previously read; and being introduced to “The Cloud of Unknowing” which I had not previously encountered. Perhaps that is because both deal with mantra meditation, which is my spiritual practice of choice.

### **Conclusions**

I spoke at the beginning of this paper about feeling somewhat out of control throughout the term. I did find it difficult to properly evaluate what we were being presented with, while trying to maintain the practices I was already doing, and which I value. Perhaps I should have just let go, as John Main did when he became a Benedictine Monk, and simply follow the practices that were being presented without “clouding” them with something else. However, I still feel that

the practices I began the term with are the ones that do work for me, and that I need to reestablish over the mid-term break.

I would, however, appreciate speaking more with you about this; or, with another spiritual director if you think that would be more appropriate.

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