**PRAYER GROUP**

July 1, 2020

***A TIME FOR A CHECK-IN***

***GREETING***

 *Leader:* Jesus said,

 “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I, in the midst of them.

***LIGHTING THE CANDLE***

 *Leader:* We light this candle as a reminder that Jesus,

 who is for us the light of the world,

 will be with us always,

 even until the end of the age.

***OPENING SENTENCES***

*Leader:* One thing I have asked of God
 this is what I seek:
 that I may dwell in the house of God
 all the days of my life;
 to behold the beauty of God
 and to seek God in God’s temple.

Who is it that you seek?
 **We seek God, the Holy One.**

 Do you seek God with all your heart?
**Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

 Do you seek God with all your soul?
**Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

 Do you seek God with all your mind?
**Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

 Do you seek God with all your strength?
**Amen. Christ, have mercy.**

***DECLARATION OF FAITH***

 *Leader:* To whom shall we go?

 You have the words of eternal life,
 and we have believed and have come to know
 that You are the Holy One of God.

 Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,
 King of endless glory.

***PRAYER***

 *Reader:* Christ, as a light illumine and guide us.
Christ, as a shield overshadow us.

 *All:* **Christ under us; Christ over us;
 Christ beside us on our left and our right.**

 *Reader:* This day be within and without us,
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.

 *Reader:* Be in the heart of each to whom we speak;
 in the mouth of each who speaks unto us.

 *Reader:* This day be within and without us,
 lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.

 *All:*  **Christ as a light; Christ as a shield;
 Christ beside us on our left and our right**.

***AN INVITATION INTO STILLNESS***

 **Let us now take a moment to settle into the silence.**

 Hear and feel the quiet of this place
 and this community of people.

 Hear and feel your quiet breathing.

 Inhale the good gifts that God provides,

 and exhale all of the things

 that you need to release.

 Breathe in strength.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Exhale exhaustion.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Breathe in freedom.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Exhale all that holds you back.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Breathe in a new sense of direction.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Exhale the paths you no longer want to use. *(Pause for breath…)*

 Breathe in hope.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Exhale self-doubt.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Breathe in unconditional love.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 Exhale distrust and hate.  *(Pause for breath…)*

 In this time of prayer,
 may our minds be open to new truth,
 and our hearts be receptive to love.

 Let us open ourselves to the Spirit of Christ

 in our midst.

***QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION***—|

* “Monastic tradition has its roots in a call to be in intimate connection with nature. The monk’s path was birthed in the forests and deserts, the places of wilderness and other wild edges that reflect an inner reality as well.”

How do you respond to the monk’s call to the edges, to wildness?

* “Our work as spiritual seekers and contemplatives is to see all of creation as woven together in holiness and to live this truth. In this loving act we begin to knit together that which has been torn; we gather all that has been scattered.”

How do your contemplative practices bear healing witness to the world?

* “Consider Earth as our original monastery. Earth is the place where we learn our most fundamental prayers, hear the call of the wild arising at dawn that awakens us to a new day, participate in the primal liturgy of praise unfolding all around us, and experience the wisdom and guidance of the seasons.”

Where in nature do you most often experience a sense of sanctuary and renewal?

* “Everything in creation becomes a catalyst for my deepened self-understanding. The forest asks me to embrace my truth once again. The hummingbird invites me to sip holy nectar, the egret to stretch out my wings, the sparrows to remember my flock. Each pine cone contains an epiphany; each smooth stone offers a revelation. I watch and witness as the sun slowly makes her long arc across the sky and discover my own rising and falling. The moon will sing of quiet miracles, like those that reveal and conceal the world every day right before our eyes.”

Which elements of nature mirror your true self back to you?

* “Earth is the first place where we experience the kind of deep physical nourishment required for our beings to thrive, but it is also a place of symbolic experience where we begin to make meaning from our experience. A matrix is a place of grounding and birthing.”

Where are the places on earth that nurture your physical, spiritual and emotional well-being?

* “We are called to a holy remembrance of a wise knowing within us. We are not separate from nature and creation. We have animal bodies, and within us is a wild and intuitive capacity that goes beyond the carefully constructed plans we have for ourselves.”

What contemplative practices resurrect the memory of the ancient kinship which connects you to holy creation?

***SOME PRACTICES TO TRY***

***CONTEMPLATIVE WALK--***Participation in the Life of Creation

See if you can bring your contemplative presence to creation to an even deeper level of participation.

Find a place where you can experience a connection to creation, such as a nearby wooded area or park.

Begin by walking around this space in the way you normally would with a contemplative awareness and openness.

Perhaps you move between listening to the world and pondering your own life journey.

Maybe you feel a subtle separation between yourself and the world due to discomfort or judgment.

Now take off your shoes and socks and stand barefoot on the ground. (If it is midwinterwith freezing temperatures, adapt this for your own needs.)

Allow some time to connect to the ground beneath you.

Deepen your breathing; as you inhale, imagine drawing up energy from the earth through your feet and up your legs.

As you exhale, imagine sending down deep roots that will draw nourishment.

Notice the temperature of the earth, the texture, the resistance or yielding of the ground.

Walk a few steps and become fully present to the way the ground feels as you move across it.

Then kneel down if you are able and feel the earth in your fingers.

Adapt as needed.

Bring all of your senses to this experience, noticing texture, smell, sounds around you, any taste arising in your mouth, what the earth looks like.

Let yourself play for a little while.

What might you have done as a child?

How might your exploration have been more free and spontaneous?

See if you can let that part of yourself have some time to explore.

Look around you and explore the texture of tree barks, the feeling of plants between your fingers, their smell.

Open yourself to the sounds around you.

Rather than reaching for sound, simply receive whatever it is you hear.

When sounds do arise, notice them and let them go.

There is no straining in this exploration, just an openness to experience.

Then open yourself to the spirit and wisdom of this place.

See if you might experience yourself connected to this earth, these trees, these flowers, woven together with them.

Feel your relationship to the insects crawling under the ground or in the trees.

Open your heart as much as you can to receive other levels of awareness beyond your five senses.

See if you can let go of trying to have a specific kind of experience, and simply sense yourself being here without agenda or goals.

How is Earth a cathedral for you?

Notice what your experience is like now.

Rest in this space as long as you desire, and see what you discover. *Paintner, Christine Valters. Earth, Our Original Monastery (pp. 12-13). Ave Maria Press. Kindle Edition.*

***HERBAL INVITATION “***Ritual Tea\*”

 (\*A ritual tea is a cup of tea you drink slowly and with intention)

Tea is one of the simplestways to work with herbs and a beautiful way to engage with God’s gifts of healing plants. You might already drink herbal teas regularly. I invite you to let this be a contemplative and full-sensory experience. There is magic for me in pouring hot water over the plant materials and being present to the scent that arises, the color that infuses the water, the warmth of the mug. I pause as the herbs steep in the water; I wait to sip until the water cools.

St. Hildegard of Bingen, known for her book on herbal medicine, would most certainly have regularly sipped healing herbs in tea form, so we can connect to her spirit as well through this action.

Begin by turning off any distractions, such as your phone, email, TV, or radio. You might choose to play some sacred music such as sacred chant or classical music. Be intentional about your choice, and know that silence is also entirely welcome. Choose the herbs you want to drink. Peppermint is a lovely choice, and it’s easy to find and can support digestion. Many people like chamomile to drink in the evening to help relax. If you’d prefer something fruity, hibiscus is a good choice and has a high vitamin C content.

Place your herbs into a pot or a special cup. You can use a tea infuser, a strainer, or a reusable tea bag in which you place the herbs and fold it to hold the herbs in. You will want to put one teaspoon of herbs into your pot or cup per one cup of boiling water. Offer gratitude for this offering from Earth for your own healing journey. If you don’t have herbs, for this experience you can work with any herbal tea you might already have at home or that is easy to buy at the local supermarket. If you have a box of peppermint tea at home, a blend of herbs, or even a green or black tea, you can move through this experience of making and drinking the tea as a prayer.

After choosing your herbs or tea, continue with some deep breathing to drop your awareness out of your mind and thoughts and down into your heart center. Let yourself experience the herbs from a heart-centered place of receiving what gifts might come. Release any need to figure out what anything might mean, and gently quiet your mind when it tells you there are things waiting on your to-do list.

This is a meditative act. As you fill your kettle from the tap, imagine the waters arriving from the rain that falls and the rivers that flow. Bless the water as it boils. Breathe deeply in the quiet moments. Bless the fire that heats the water, even if the source is electric.

Once the water boils, pour the water over the herbs and savor the steam that rises. Watch the herbs dance and bring their color to the water. Close your eyes for a few moments as the tea begins to steep. Breathe and pause and listen. Imagine the heat of the water breaking open the goodness of the plant material to make it available to you to drink. Feel the warmth of the cup; smell the fragrance as it rises. Savor this moment with nowhere else to be.

After a few minutes, once the herbs have steeped and the water cooled enough to drink, you can bring your tea to your lips for the first sip. Drink a small amount, feeling it in your mouth, tasting the flavor, then swallowing it and imagining the way it moves through your body systems to bring nourishment.

Bring your awareness to this exploration of Earth as the original cathedral. Imagine this ritual tea is an act of communion with creation, celebrating the gifts of healing and nourishment Earth offers. Give gratitude to God for any special places of sanctuary that restore and renew you. Continue drinking the tea in this way. Continue to savor each sip and this time of stillness and reflection.

*Paintner, Christine Valters. Earth, Our Original Monastery (pp. 14-15). Ave Maria Press. Kindle Edition.*

***PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION***

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other’s burdens.

Listen to our hearts’ longings for the healing of our world…

***THE LORD’S PRAYER***

***WORDS OF BLESSING***

*Leader:* The strength of the rising sun,
 the strength of the swelling sea,
 the strength of the high mountains,
 the strength of the fertile plains,
 the strength of the everlasting river
 flowing in us and through us this day,
 the strength of the river of God
 flowing in us and through us this day.