



The Baptism of the Lord

January 13, 2019

Readings

This week:

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Next week:

Isaiah 62:1-5

Corinthians 12:4-11

John 2:1-11

Psalm

The Lord will bless his people with peace. (*Psalm 29*)

Today

Today's presider is Fr. Larry Percell.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. Members of the Thomas Merton community plan these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate by check or cash, every Sunday there is a donation basket in the back of Church or by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope in the bulletin the last Sunday of every month to mail your donation. Please do not put your TMC donation in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).

Calendar

Monday, January 14, 7:00 pm

Liturgy Team, Thomas House

From Thomas Merton

Why should I want to be rich, when You were poor? Why should I desire to be famous and powerful? Why should I cherish in my heart a hope that devours me—the hope for perfect happiness in this life—when such hope, doomed to frustration, is nothing but despair?

My hope is in what the eye has never seen. Therefore, let me not trust in visible rewards.

My hope is in what the heart cannot feel. Therefore, let me not trust in the feelings of my heart

My hope is in what the hand has never touched. Do not let me trust what I can grasp between my fingers.

Death will loosen my grasp and my vain hope will be gone.

—*Thoughts in Solitude*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy; to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality; and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Heart and Home shelter needs your help:

The parish Human Concerns committee is looking for contributions for the Heart and Home Collaborative Shelter, an overnight women's shelter serving unhoused women in the Palo Alto area during the winter months. If you can help, write a check to H&H Collaborative. It is also looking for volunteers, at all levels of commitment, in an evening or morning shift at University Lutheran Church (1611 Stanford Avenue). You can sign up for a 90-minute shift, a 3-hour shift, or to bring dinner. And you are invited to eat dinner with the shelter clients. Go to www.hhcollab.org for more information.

Talk on Merton by Dr. Michael W. Higgins:

Save February 23 at 3:00 pm for a talk by Michael W. Higgins, PhD, on Merton and Martin Luther King and what might have been had they had an in-person conversation. Higgins has written several biographies of Merton and a couple on Henri Nouwen, as well as volumes on the Jesuits, Catholic education, women and the church, saint-making, and the clerical sex abuse scandal. Most are available on Amazon or other used book websites. More details will be forthcoming.

Thank you to all Adopt-a-Family elves:

Thank you to everyone who made Christmas special by contributing to our Adopt-a-Family program. This year we adopted six Seton families consisting of 32 people. We were able to buy two family gifts for each and a gift and certificate for each of the Seton students. We also gifted five toddlers and babies, a total of 55 gifts. Thanks to cash donors, we gave each family \$70 to help with Christmas meals. Gratitude overflowed from the families. Those who delivered the gifts described the children's joy as "monumental," with extreme delight at having gifts to open. One family sent a card with this message: "Thanks to the church for making a lovely Christmas for my family. We wish you a Merry Christmas and New Year full of health and blessings."



During the month of January, we ask you to be especially generous in your giving to our food collection program. Since most of the people we help are homeless, we ask for foods that are portable and nutritious: soups or chili in flip-top cans, Vienna sausage, boxes of crackers packed in 'small stacks,' fruit cups, granola bars, juice pouches, and small bottles of water.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Rohr: Church needs an 'awakening of the soul':

By Heidi Schlumpf, NCR national correspondent, December 10, 2018, ncronline.org

Unless Christians rediscover the "bigger heart" and "bigger mind" of the mystical and contemplative tradition, the church will be unable to make positive change in the world — or reform itself, said spiritual author and teacher Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr. And the "master of the mystical life" is Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and spiritual writer who died 50 years ago, Rohr said in a keynote address at a conference marking the half-century anniversary of Merton's death.

"Merton gave us the tools to develop a deeper sense of consciousness and therefore conscience," said Rohr, criticizing the kind of "kindergarten Christianity" that makes an idol of a political party or country. "That's heresy," said Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "God loves people on the other side of the border as much as on this side. A lot of Christians don't know that."

Rohr urged an "awakening of the soul" that incorporates Merton's "ontological spirituality"—what Rohr terms "non-dual consciousness" because it does not focus on distinctions and either/or thinking—as an antidote to the anger and judgmentalism he sees in the United States. "The churches are not doing their job," he said. "That we can create such a high amount of angry, dualistic people, who see everything in terms of winning and losing [means] Christianity has not



...Rohr, continued:

handed on its heritage. When you don't have a real God, your nation and your politics, of course, become your god."

Mystics, like Merton, reject the splits of dualistic thinking, while others revel in them, Rohr said. Most people "like to prove that they're right and other people are wrong. That's of almost no interest to a mystic," he said.

Rohr said he learned from Merton that contemplatives overcome the subject-object split and instead see everything "subject to subject, center to center." "You grant them dignity, give them voice: I don't care if it's a lizard or a leaf. If it exists, if it's in the great chain of being, it has dignity," Rohr said.

...Rohr shared personal reminiscences of how, as a young seminarian before the Second Vatican Council, reading Merton changed his life. In the early 1960s, Rohr stopped at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, where Merton lived, and was rewarded not only with a glimpse of his spiritual hero walking a few feet in front of him—but of the nun from India who had begun working with the poor: Mother Teresa. "I kid you not, action and contemplation walked right in front of me," Rohr said, noting that that image inspired him when he founded his spiritual center in 1986. The ecumenical center teaches contemplation through conferences, on-site and online courses, webcasts and daily e-mail meditations. The Catholic Church of Rohr's upbringing did not offer these spiritual resources, he recalled. Instead, it was focused on a "moral spirituality" in which people experienced God by obeying commandments or through "pious devotionism," which "kept the tribe together" but "didn't change your life."

With his writings in the 1950s and '60s, Merton "almost single-handedly" called the Roman Catholic Church to recover the contemplative tradition that had been maintained in the Eastern churches and that Rohr called the "perennial tradition" in other religions of the world. But many clergy did not embrace contemplation, Rohr said, because it threatened their "job security." "If you teach contemplative prayer, then the need for mediators is much lessened," he said. "You don't need Father."

Rohr also noted that contemplation need not be restricted to monasteries. "If we just keep preaching a form of contemplation that demands celibacy and solitude, we're wasting our time," he said. "If you've got to even sit on a mat twice a day to know God, then 99 percent of the children God has ever created cannot know God." Instead, contemplation and transformation can be experienced through "great love and great suf-

How do you plan for eternity?:

By Alice Camille, at uscatholic.org, November 20, 2018. Camille is the author of *Working Toward Sainthood* (Twenty-Third Publications) and other titles

The easiest goal to come up with is no goal at all. I can say this confidently, being a lifelong fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants sort of person. An old boyfriend, Sam, used to cluck disapprovingly at my attitude toward life. "The woman without a plan!" he would hiss at me. So I



claimed the title proudly: The Woman Without a Plan. Which is not the same as being without a clue, I want to point out.

Sam had well-developed charts, diagrams, and algorithms for his career trajectory: Ph.D., university tenure, best-sellers, politics, and the presidency were carefully plotted out in a future as concretely and tangibly as if it were a done deal. Twenty years later, he's achieved the first two and published several books—not bestsellers, but still. By comparison, without so much as a single Venn diagram for company, I've managed to earn a master's degree. I hasten to add that I've written five times as many books as Mr. Focused; but alas, none of mine are best-sellers either. Yet I can't dismiss Sam's zeal for his

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fering," which is available to everyone, Rohr said. For Rohr, "the mystical mind, the contemplative mind, is the pearl of great price," which can address almost every pastoral, political and relationship issue, he said. "It doesn't teach you what to see; it teaches you how to see."

Without contemplation, Christians can get trapped into focusing on distinctions, such as skin color or gender. "Like that matters to God?" Rohr said. "That you have Christians who can't see beyond that. . . means you have Christians with no interior life."

Instead, people must discover the "true self" the *imago dei* in oneself and others, Rohr said, citing Merton: "What we must become is what we already are." "God is just another word for everything," Rohr said. "Don't say you love God if you don't love everything."

How do you plan for eternity?, continued:

goals. Nor would I write off the possibility that one day an old boyfriend of mine might well occupy the chair in the Oval Office. The smart money is always on The Man With a Plan.

Which brings us to Philo. Not the flaky pastry dough but the very solid Jewish philosopher of the first century. Philo was an older contemporary of Jesus who lived in Alexandria, Egypt. Since Jesus hadn't visited Egypt but for a brief flight in infancy, to our knowledge the two men never met. But we get the sense they would have liked each other. Both were serious about the responsibility of being fully alive, the power in words, and the necessity of clearly understanding the expectations of the God of Israel as revealed in the Jewish story.

Philo was a Man With a Plan. He intended to reconcile the mostly obscure beliefs of Judaism with the public richness of the Greco-Roman worldview. His take on biblical stories sounds incredibly modern, as he interpreted them allegorically rather than as literal history.

...Most of us are familiar with at least one Philo quote, even if we didn't know he said it: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." My favorite of his wares is this one: "The true name of eternity is today." There are so many places this idea can take us! Today is happening right now, of course. But when we wake up tomorrow, it will still be today. And the next day as well. In fact yesterday was today as we lived it, which means all that you and I have ever known or can know is today.

Today is the vital hour, the only living hour, the hour upon which the future rises or falls. Because today is our everlasting living room, it can rightfully be identified as eternity. We reside in an endless realm of to-days, stretching from the first moment of time into infinity. Which makes parallels between today and eternity completely fair and remarkably useful.

This is helpful to consider when the Letter to the Hebrews is on your plate. . . . [In it] the writer is drawing an elaborate theological parallel between Jewish sacrifice and the Jesus sacrifice. The actions of the Jewish priest are daily rituals, repeated to ensure harmony between heaven and earth once more. The actions of Jesus, by contrast, are . . . performed by one made perfect in obedience, [and] effectively break through the glass ceiling of the present to eternity.

Which do you prefer, reconciliation for now or for always? Think of it this way: If you could take out the

trash once and for all rather than having to do it every single week, wouldn't you opt for that? . . . Yet our relationship to eternity is far less firm than our allegiance to today. We like the maneuverability of keeping our options open. We like to . . . feel we're in control of this beast of time we're riding.

Take aging, for instance. We're all doing it right now. Yet half of all Americans have no retirement plan, and 1 in 3 have zero dollars put away for their later years. It turns out even The Woman Without a Plan is better prepared for old age than 75% of my fellow citizens. Al-



though it did take a lot of prodding from a fellow writer to get me to start that IRA 20 years ago. What could explain the phenomenon that most of us are standing like deer in headlights for an event that is surely arriving for nearly all of us? That is, unless we die young, which is not a retirement plan many

would select. The plain truth is that you and I bank on today, not on tomorrow and much less on eternity. Our hearts and treasures are buried in today, and it's very challenging to imagine ourselves residing in any other reality. Philo may view eternity as a horizon of endless todays, but we prefer to bury our faces in this today and give an ostrich-like rump to what comes next. Recently I accompanied my 90-year-old mother to tour a campus of graduated care run by a group of Catholic sisters. My mother has lived in the same house for 70 years, including a decade without my dad. She's perfectly capable of getting by on her own. For now. But at 90, she'll be giving up her driver's license soon, and that will be a game changer in her small town with limited services. The Catholic campus we visited is a half hour from where Mom has always lived. It has lovely cottages for independent living, shuttle services everywhere, plus dancing, card games, casino trips, movie nights, and daily Mass. It would provide the one thing she values most in her current home: a close parish feeling. After viewing the premises, Mom admitted it was all very nice. It was good to have in her back pocket, an option for later if needed. In the 21st century, people her age can continue to talk about later as if it were a place they are heading to somewhere down the road, too far to presently contemplate. Mom could live another decade—or two. Why get an endgame together now, when today is so compelling and so comfortable? You can see where The Woman Without a Plan gets her inspiration. And why it's so hard for any of us to invest in eternity, with both feet planted firmly in today.