

Spending *time with the Sacred Heart*

Dear Friends of the Sacred Heart,

Nothing perhaps is so beyond our grasp as the passage of time. Moment by moment slips away and we are at a loss as to how to halt the flow of time. "The days come and go," says the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, "and if we do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away." Time is precious. Maybe priceless would be the better word. Knowing this priceless quality, today's fast-paced society is obsessed with time's management. We are given performance skills so that we can get the most of every moment. We are congratulated if we have acquired the gift of "multi-tasking." With a spirit of avariciousness our world seeks to manipulate time's passage through every conceivable means... drugs, mind-expansion techniques, consciousness-altering meditations, even pills to "smarten us up." We feel compelled to compete in a world-wide time marathon. We tap our fingers nervously, fiddle with the nearest gadget, sigh exasperated sighs of impatience and boredom, fill our empty moments with extra sleep, extra food, extra little unmentionable compulsions. We smother ourselves in the malaise of "clock time" devoid of meaning and purpose.

Turning our focus toward spiritual values, however, makes us aware that time can take on a different dimension. How relative time is according to the words of the Psalmist who sings: "In God's eyes a thousand years are like yesterday... come and gone... no more than a watch in the night." While we live in time, God lives in eternity and all our earthly days are but a journey into that eternal moment, into the fullness of time - the pleroma.

Remarkably, there are times when that eternal moment breaks through our cloudy consciousness with depth and intensity. A deeper meaning surfaces, hidden threads of harmony are seen, God's presence and providence take hold. Time may even seem to stand still. Prayer is possible. Light and peace settle into our souls. If only such experiences could be prolonged and tasted with more frequency.

So often I have heard it said since coming to the monastery how fortunate we are here to be able to have so much time to pray and reflect. People's perceptions of our life envision us spending our days in idyllic repose, free from all earthly cares and worries. To be sure, we do have an atmosphere of quiet, and yes, there is inner peace. But to those of us who may have come thinking that life would somehow change into a heavenly utopia, we soon became "awakened" to other realities. There is a "relentlessness" about the monastic schedule which calls for a real discipline of spirit. Time is God's time, which does not necessarily mean "our time." As one new member recalled, "I expected after giving up a career in teaching that my monastic days would be filled with a prayerful 'inactivity' - time, as I thought, 'to smell the roses'. I can only smile to myself knowing that I am now busier than ever."

Even in monasteries there is no exemption from meeting deadlines and arriving promptly for community activities. The secret, I believe, to acquiring what one spiritual writer has call “contemplative leisure” is really a matter of the heart. Within the heart lies the turf of spiritual activity or leisure. The heart that willingly allows itself to be touched by God’s presence receives a restfulness that transcends time and place. With such an experience we are at once emptied of the superficial worries that gnaw away at us and somehow filled with an assurance that God’s goodness will prevail. In the words of Julian of Norwich, that “all will be well.” So little by little, our world of worry gives way to the powerful yet ever so gentle intuition that God’s spirit is over all, permeating all, carrying our lives into that time where there is no time.

Recognizing God’s time can also have its crucial side. Jesus knew the significance of recognizing “the day of the Lord.” He knew instinctively, prophetically, when his own death was approaching. He even wept on his entry into the city of Jerusalem when others remained oblivious to God’s time. “You did not recognize the time when God came to save you!” he cried [Lk 19, 44]. He countered his disciples’ slow-witted comprehension along these lines. They could not penetrate into God’s ways and God’s time.

The lessons of the Gospel relate the importance of having a spiritual balance in regard to time. Jesus’ words exhort us to develop a responsible concern that God’s moments of grace-filled presence do not go by unheeded. Yet, his words also encourage us to surrender our innate desires to control time and slowly put our anxieties into the hands of God’s providential care. We must be in some ways like Saint Margaret Mary who left all the troubles and endless complexities of human living in the wise and ever-knowing heart of her God.

Meeting someone who has learned the lessons of God’s time, is, I think, like looking into the face of eternity. There is a peacefulness that communicates without words. There is a look that mirrors the beautiful spiritual landscape of restful waters and lush cool vegetation that is constantly fruitful in due season. The eternal springs of God’s own heart irrigate such a soul. Such a person, when found, is a living testimony to the new life portrayed by the Psalmist’s image of the **tree that is planted by flowing rivers, whose leaves never fade.**

So many of us here today have spent long hours in the contemplative atmosphere of quiet places of grace - including our own chapel. We have watched and waited and listened to the silent voice of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we have sought solutions to difficulties in our work, family, or personal environments. Simply dwelling in God’s presence may have been the blessing we need to restore hope to our hearts, to give us new courage to continue. Time spent in such a way is never wasted. God knows our desires, our needs, even before we make them known. So whether we come in celebration or sorrow, the Heart of Jesus awaits us.

Spending time with the Heart of Christ is a sacred moment of encounter with the source of universal love. No one comes way from such an encounter without reaping blessings and benefits. In our busiest and most trying moments, God is ever with us. God waits for us, welcomes us, desires to share the timeless treasures of life and love with us. Wherever we may be, whatever we may be doing, the love of Christ’s sacred heart can encompass us. Our time is never better spent that in approaching that Divine Heart and experiencing the wonders of its hidden love. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on August 4th, 2019. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talks will be held on Sunday, October 6th, 2019 at 4:00 p.m.