

Weekly Musing † October 10, 2011

Many people have seen this famous marble carving of *St. Teresa of Avila in Ecstasy* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and have not known to whom it was referring. St. Theresa lived in the 16th century and was a Carmelite nun. She founded many monasteries but perhaps more importantly, she helped formulate the notion of Christian meditation.

Many people think conversation with God exists in two very different forms, prayer, and a true religious experience. We are apt to regard prayer as not having much emotional color to it and this is often true enough. We are skeptical of religious ecstasy or mysticism because it is often not part of our experience. St. Theresa wrote of and practiced Christian meditation -- a religious exercise somewhere between prayer and mystic encounter. There are many methods of Christian meditation. I have used one in this parish based on the method of St. Peter of Alcantara who was a contemporary and friend of St. Teresa.



St. Peter of Alcantara's Method of Meditation

It may render useful service to those who are left to their own resources.

Its six parts are:

1. The preparation or the placing of oneself in God's presence;
2. The reading of a spiritual theme or subject;
3. The consideration of the foregoing in which the intellect, the imagination and especially the heart are engaged;
4. The prayer of thanksgiving for this and all divine favors;
5. The total offering of self and of Christ and His saints to the Father;
6. The prayer of petition for oneself, the Church and all immortal souls.

Any soul that will use this little instrument with sincerity, regularity and real devotion, allowing the Holy Ghost to work within him as He sees fit, is sure to gain a strong and lasting foothold on the road to sanctity.



I include this to point out the difference between what this method suggests and what I suspect people think Christian meditation is-- a pietistic exercise intended to increase your religious experience and/or faith. Note the method includes thanksgiving, the offering of self and intercession for the church as a whole. I surmise many Christians think any prayer should be free form and to suggest a form is somehow to limit God. However, our time with God does not profit by an exercise where we simply let our mind wander off anymore than our time with those we love profits from anything less than an effort to love and serve.

I am not quoting from St. Teresa's writings because, well, because I don't much like them or find them helpful. There I have said it. Different periods and different saints produce different views of God and different views of reaching Him. It is not necessary for all Christians to be alike or all periods alike. This rather simple understanding of diversity has often alluded many of our co-religionists for reasons I have never completely understood.



Ethiopian icon of Christ with the four gospel writers and the four angels. Starting in the upper right the symbols are: Eagle- St. John, Man- St. Matthew, Lion- St. Mark, Bull- St. Luke



*Inside the Big Sky chapel, Home of All Saints Episcopal and Lutheran Church
Bishop Jessica Crist, Bishop C. Franklin Brookhart, Pastor Darius Larsen*

News from St. Luke's

Thanks to Libby Laird, Nancy McManus, P.J. Willett, and Lee and Carla Stadtmiller for representing us at diocesan convention which was held at Big Sky. This is a beautiful location. We stayed at Buck's T-4. Various elections for diocesan offices were held. Our own Lee Stadtmiller was elected to the Sanding Committee. I was elected to nothing, clearly an act of God. The most important thing at diocesan convention, at least for me, is worship. The opening Eucharist for me is always a time for a panoply of things: thanksgiving, layers of memory, joy, and even contemplation. I have no trouble feeling the presence of Christ at those moments. Bishop Jessica Crist, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Montana Synod (133 churches) was our special guest.

Don't forget:

This Sunday is the United Thank Offering Ingathering. This offering traditionally gathered by the women of the church does an enormous amount of good work in our church. Our own diocese has benefited by it more than once.

After the 10 am service this Sunday we will have a church clean-up and fix-up day. Wear old clothes. A light lunch will be served.



*The Rev. Canon Gary Waddingham
Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Regional Canon, Diocese of Montana*