

Epiphany 5 Year B 7th Feb 2021

Mark 1:35-39

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

INNER

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. - Mark 1:35

The beginning of Jesus' ministry begins in prayer, when he is driven out by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days (Mark 1:9-13). It is out of the silence and struggle of the desert that Jesus gets clarity about his vocation. The first thing Jesus when he comes back out of the desert is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14).

The same pattern is repeated here, in Mark 1:35:

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. - Mark 1:35.

The Trappist monk, and author of many books on contemplation, Thomas Merton, in one of his writings says:

"Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude, where everything I touch is turned into prayer: where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer, the wind in the trees is my prayer, for God is all in all....In true prayer, although every silent moment remains the same, every moment is a new discovery of a new silence, a new penetration into that eternity in which all things are always new. We know, by fresh discovery, the deep reality that is our concrete existence here and now... and in the depths of that reality we receive from the Father light, truth, wisdom and peace. These are the reflection of God in our souls which are made to be God's image and likeness" (Thoughts in Solitude).

If it is true that silence creates a space to receive wisdom and peace (and it has been a long tradition in Christianity, that it does), then how do WE make space for silence and prayer in our lives – where God's Spirit can remake us from within?

Responding to that question is part of what we are doing in Contemplation.

OUTER

After his early morning prayer, Jesus moves INTO the the inevitable demands of the outer world which call for his love.

He says to his disciples, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message [the message of the kingdom of God] there also; for that is what I came out to do." Mark 1:38

Jesus lets us be in no doubt about this inexorable and simultaneous movement of two dimensions, the horizontal and the vertical – the *contemplative (vertical)* AND the *actively engaged with the world (horizontal)* – the *outer* AND the *inner*.

The closer we come to God as we plumb the depth of *contemplation*, the greater grows our craving to **love human beings** on the level of *action*.

Laurence Freeman from the World Community for Christian Meditation constantly reminds us that the purpose of meditation is not to have nice peaceful feelings (a kind of spiritual Panadol), although there is nothing wrong at all with nice feelings when they come, so long as our meditation does not stop at that point and go no further. The goal of meditation is union with the God who is love, and in that process that we will become more loving.

This is the way Laurence Freeman put it:

[Divine] Love also pervades every human being, every atom, every relationship, every thought, every act. Love is the great pervasive energy of creation, and it is this universal energy of love that **unites the inner and**

the outer worlds of our existence: the **inner** world of our private, solitary selves and the **outer** world in which we live and relate and create and destroy, love and hate and fear, and so on.

The **inner** and the **outer** worlds are united by this pervasive energy of love.

(Aspects of Love 1 by Laurence Freeman OSB)

This is what we hear in the reading today. Jesus prays and so connects deeply to God and this drives him into loving engagement with the world. The inner and the outer. The vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Christian life.

The authentic spiritual journey is one in which:

*Prayer finds expression in active love...and

* as we love people, we discover how much we need grace, and this draws us into prayer.