

Daily Meditation 06-24-24

Sister Dorothy Stang to be Recognized as a Modern-Day Martyr

Good morning.

In today's daily meditation, we celebrate the story of Sister Dorothy Stang, who has just received a new honor for her life and work, and teaching and martyrdom, where she will be included with a small group of persons recognized by the Vatican as “Modern Martyrs.” She's the only woman in the group, and the only North American.

It's a thing we can all take joy and delight and even pride, in this recognition of this generous Sister, who gave herself to work with the peasants and the poor in the Amazon, for 42 years in Brazil. And also in defending the rainforest from those forces of greed. They were trying to banish the peasants, and tear down the forest. So truly, she is a patron saint of the ecological movement. And it has great meaning to me, I think, and to all of our faculty, that she attended our school, the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality at Holy Names College during her sabbatical. And her brothers, who were very close to her, wrote me about the influence and the impact that our Creation Spirituality movement and education had upon her.

Her brother Tom Stang said that *your influence and help for Dorothy's work was immense. The Via Positiva, Negativa, Creativa, and Transformativa enhanced Dot's ability to survive, as she delved into the needs of the poor and their enormous oppression by the rich.*

And she wrote her brother a letter in 1991 about her work and her coworkers, and said, *In the midst of violence, there are many small communities that have learned the secret of life: Sharing. Solidarity. Confidence. Equality. Pardon. Working Together. It does not matter the religious belief, as long as human values guide them.* Notice the deep ecumenism here.

God is present, Father, Mother, Generator, Sustainer of Life. So life is productive in the midst of all this killing and violence.

But she also speaks about the Cosmic Christ, when she says she was *continuing to learn how to help people recapture a relationship with Mother Earth, that is tender and kind: God's gift to us to live more fully as part of our cosmic universe.*

And one biographer said that “Sister Dorothy was to carry the tenets of Creation Spirituality with her for the rest of her days.” So clearly we can all be proud of having known her, and even having been her teachers and supporters and students in our midst, that she is part of this Sanctuary of New Martyrs. And let us remember that there are thousands, literally thousands of

martyrs in South America and Central America, during this period of disruption of the indigenous peoples and the peasants and the tearing down of the forests, for the sake of fast bucks made, to turn forests into land for cattle.

She wrote when she was being advised to leave her place, because it was dangerous -- she was a leader, and she was being marked -- she wrote,

I don't want to flee, nor do I want to abandon the battle of these farmers who live without any protection in the forest. They have the sacrosanct right, to aspire to a better life on land, where they can live and work with dignity, respecting the environment. Indeed, she said, the death of the forest is the end of our lives.

Family and friends reported that following her study of Creation Spirituality, when she returned to Brazil, she began to talk more about God as Mother, or Father/Mother, and related more to the feminine side of God. They found her to be more playful, more passionate, more creative.

Dorothy had been hidden for a while under the weight of so many violent, sorrowful experiences, one of her sisters said. But she told her brothers that Creation Spirituality helped her to support her courage, her courage to live out her vocation. And she told a friend, Sister Barbara English: 'Being at ICCS was a tremendous moment for me, a highlight. It really helped me deepen in relation to ecology, which I had embraced very much in my heart for years, even when I was in Arizona, in the desert,' where she worked for several years. 'The program,' she testified, 'opened up another dimension of my faith. There was a tremendous lift.'

So all this went into her work, and her courage to sustain her work, persevere in her work, in spite of much dangerous opposition. And of course, the Art As Meditation classes that she took great delight in, she loved to draw and dance. And we're reminded of what psychologist Claudio Naranjo said, that "Art As Meditation is the way of the prophets."

And clearly, Sister Dorothy was a prophet, because she interfered with the corporate efforts to tear down the rainforest and to uproot the peasant farmers. She refused to abandon them, or to abandon her vocation to support them.

Now I'd like to close with a beautiful teaching from Meister Eckhart, where he tells us, "We can all rejoice in the success of others." People like Sister Dorothy. He says:

There is joy at justice. Justice cannot harm people, for all joy, pleasure and happiness are justice. The just person rejoices inexpressibly more in the work of justice than she, or even the highest Angel, has joy and happiness in this natural being of life. They are the ones who, for this reason, gladly gave their lives for the sake of justice. And we are to rejoice at all our neighbors'

joys as if they were our own. This is like finding the Kingdom of Heaven itself. And God will rejoice at these works, through and through. Nothing remains in the divine ground that is not thoroughly enlivened by joy.

And so the occasion of honoring and remembering Sister Dorothy's sacrifice, her work, her life, and her death, is an occasion of joy for all of us: that the last word of martyrs is not sadness and tears, it is rejoicing at their strength, at their example of modeling what we are all capable of, a generous and joyful commitment to justice and compassion.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.