

Daily Meditation 4-20-26

Word from Hungary, Washington D.C. and the Pope in Africa

Good morning.

In today's daily meditation, first we talked a bit about the Hungarian election, and I was told by someone who saw my early version of my DM for today, that the video of Hungarians singing, "We are the Champions," brings full circle something that happened in Budapest 40 years ago. At that time, the group called Queen was one of the only rock groups ever to perform behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, and apparently they sang, "We are the Champions" at that time. They've been loved, been beloved there ever since, actually. So that's kind of interesting factoid.

Also in today's meditation, when we talk about the Pope fighting it out with Donald Trump, not because he chose to, but because he's not afraid to fight back — he knows something about bullies, I guess — I alluded to how Hildegard of Bingen took on emperors and others in her day. So I want to bring that up again. Give you examples.

Of course, Hildegard was a woman, and she was not a pope. Quite the opposite. She took on popes, criticized them. But all the more amazing that she was not afraid to take on kings and emperors. For example, she wrote to King Henry II, who is notorious for having murdered Thomas à Becket, ordering the murder of Thomas à Becket in the Cathedral of Canterbury in 1170. Of course, the Cathedral of Canterbury was in the news recently, because a new Archbishop in the Anglican Church was anointed there, and the first-ever female Archbishop of Canterbury.

Hildegard also wrote to King Conrad III who had been in the Second Crusade. And she wrote this: *Listen, there are certain ways in which you are turning from God. This is a king she's writing. The times in which you live are as frivolous as a gossiping woman. These times too tend towards a hostile injustice. It strives to destroy the justice in the vineyard of the Lord. God, who knows all these things, speaks to you, O King. When you hear this, O man, pull yourself together against your self-will, and improve yourself so that you may come purified to the times in which you need no more to be ashamed of your days.* Now I wonder if that admonition of a king in the 12th century might apply to an admonition of a president in the 21st century. She urged him to *imitate the highest judge and ruler in his compassion.*

But she also took on Emperor Barbarossa, and wrote him four letters that we possess. They also met once in person. But when Barbarossa chose to choose a papal candidate in opposition to the Pope in Rome, Hildegard was furious, and she compared him in a letter to an infant and a madman. And again, Barbarossa named another anti-pope, and Hildegard wrote him: *He Who Is says, I destroy contumacy, and by myself, I crush the resistance of those who despise me. Woe, woe to the malice of wicked men who defy me. Hear this, King, if you wish to live otherwise, my sword will smite you.* These were words from Hildegard.

And she talks about hard-hearted people and greedy people who *do not get what they want, they fall into depression from which they are not lightly lifted. You snake like hellish tongues, you dare to live without the verdancy of God's grace*, she says. *I saw a vision of you in dense smoke with very large black eyes, because you say, Why should I do any work for others? Why should I wear myself out? Nothing excites me except what benefits me directly.* Now that seems kind of pertinent to certain leaders in our time. *Let God, who created all things, take care of these things. For if I am always busy being compassionate, what good will it do me? What kind of life will I have? Will I pay attention to all the happy and sad people? I will take care of myself, let others take care of themselves. So speak people who are hard-hearted*, she says. And hard-heartedness, she says, *is the worst sin, since it shows no mercy, neither does it think that charity is necessary, nor does it do any good works. Hard-heartedness is strong in tyrants*, she writes.

Now as for taking on popes, she took on Pope Anastasius: *Why do you tolerate the evil ways of people who, in the darkness of foolishness, draw everything harmful to themselves? They are like hens who make noise during the night and terrify themselves.* She's talking about the people in the Curia who surround the Pope and giving advice. I find that interesting to apply to today's cabinet, presidential cabinet: *they are like hens who make noise during the night and terrify themselves. Why do you tolerate the evil ways of people who, in the darkness of foolishness, draw everything harmful to themselves?* And she wrote the Pope, *O man, you will be so shaken that the strength of your feet, the feet on which you now stand, will disappear. For you don't love the king's daughter Justice — but as in delirium of sleep, you push her away from you. That is why she will flee from you, unless you call her back. Oh you, O Man who have been placed as a visible Shepherd, wise up and hasten quickly to Justice, so that you will not be criticized by the Great Doctor for not having cleansed your feet from dirt, for not having anointed them with oil.*

So you see the virtue of justice and compassion. These virtues keep returning to so much of Hildegard's criticism of leaders, emperors, kings, popes in her day. I think it's just one

more example, where the call to resistance in our time means to respond with strength and bluntness and directness, just as in Hildegard's time. She responded that way to all the uppity-ups that she wrote to.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.