

Daily Meditation 7-13-26

Beauty & Grace, Aquinas & Eckhart: Medicine in a Time of Despair

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we're talking about the healing medicine that art is meant to be, and the relationship between creativity and art, and justice and social transformation.

There's so many examples of this in my article today, but also in our legacy of Creation Spirituality. I've brought out a number of these in my book *Original Blessing*, some of which occur at the end of today's meditation. But part of what we're saying is that the feminine aspect, we're bringing back the feminine dimension to spirituality and to social justice, when we talk about creativity. The Via Creativa leads into the Via Transformativa. Carl Jung said, after all, that "creativity comes from the realm of the mothers," the realm of the mothers, that we all become mothers in our creative work in some way, and this is a direct alternative to patriarchy, of course. It's bringing in what has been missing in our educational systems and often our religious systems, which have been at times overly rational.

So let me share some more teachings along this line that I find to be very, very rich. On page 199 of *Original Blessing*, I'm citing Thomas Merton, the Catholic monk. *Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time. The mind that responds to the intellectual and spiritual values that lie hidden in a poem, a painting, or a piece of music, discovers a spiritual vitality that lifts it above itself, takes it out of itself, makes it present to itself on a level of being that it did not know it could ever achieve.*

Lifts it above itself, takes it out of itself, makes it present to itself on a whole new level. That's what we undergo in creating and in art, whether we are receivers of the art, or creators of the art. I think that is a very profound meditation on the value of art and how it brings us to new levels of being, and wrestling with our values in new and fresh ways. Saint Paul actually says, "We are God's work of art." We are God's work of art.

I cite from Arturo Paoli, an activist Catholic priest in the Second World War, who harbored a lot of Jews, protecting them from the Mussolini Fascists of Italy. "To be religious is to give your life so that the world may be more beautiful, more just, more at peace." Notice how these are synonyms for them: beauty, justice, peace. "It is to prevent egotistical or self-serving ends from disrupting this harmony of the whole." Harmony of

the whole is a synonym for justice. Justice creates harmony. Justice makes harmony possible. Injustice, extreme gaps between very rich and poor, for example, creates disharmony, and it is not sustainable, ultimately.

Albert Einstein said, *The greatness of an artist lies in this: the building of an inner world, and the inability to reconcile this inner world with the outer. And in the ability to reconcile this inner world with the outer.* So Einstein is acknowledging and celebrating how the artist again, whether we be the birthers of the art or the receivers of the art, that all art is meant to develop an inner world. And then the next step, as Einstein said, is to reconcile the inner world to the outer world.

M.C. Richards, famous for her iconic book *Centering* — She was a painter and a potter and a poet and philosopher — *The discipline comes in when we have to pay attention to what we don't like, aren't interested in, don't understand, mistrust. When we have to read the poetry of our enemies, within or without. And so the language of art takes us into a milieu that we may not be comfortable in, but that's part of its power. It puts us in the shoes, if we will, of others different from ourselves.*

Kenji Mi is a lot to say, Buddhist poet, Japanese poet. He says, *We ordinary people must forge our own beauty. We must set fire to the grayness of our labor with the art of our own lives.* The art of our own lives. In this kind of creation, every day becomes a pure enjoyment, so that every day we are busy as artists, giving birth to ourselves and to all our relationships, and he sees this not as a burden, but as a pure enjoyment.

And the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann says that every totalitarian regime is frightened by the artist. Is that why the present administration is busy trying to take over the Kennedy Arts Center, and firing comedians and satirists from television? *Every totalitarian regime is frightened by the artist. Indeed, poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality.* That is from his important book, *Prophetic Imagination*, where he makes a point that every prophet is employing imagination to wake people up, to get us to see life differently, and to contribute more graciously, and more courageously to a better world.

Alfred North Whitehead, great scientist and philosopher, says, “The teleology of the universe is directed to the production of beauty.” The teleology, the end purpose of the universe, is directed to the production of beauty. *The type of truth required for this final stretch of beauty, is a discovery, not a recapitulation. Apart from beauty, truth is neither good nor bad. Truth matters because of beauty.* Truth matters because of beauty. Well, if we have leaders who are busy lying and not telling truth or seeking truth or caring about truth, then these same leaders are not bringing forth beauty, if truth and beauty are the

same. And we are living in such a time; things become uglier and uglier, and lies rather than truth are taken into many means of information, media, and so forth. And it's one reason I think that autocrats are afraid of the truth. They're afraid of those who tell the truth, and many artists are telling the truth. I think that statement from Whitehead is extremely important when he's connecting truth and beauty, beauty and truth. We cannot live explicitly as a people together without both.

Paulo Freire, the educationist from Brazil, says that *the oppressed must realize that they are fighting not merely for freedom from hunger, but for freedom to create and to construct, to wonder, and to venture*. That's, to me, pure Creation Spirituality: to wonder, to venture, the Via Positiva. But you need freedom to do that, and you need freedom to create, the Via Creativa. That is what liberation means in the context of oppression.

Gustavo Gutiérrez is credited with being the father of liberation theology, but he himself gives credit to his mentor Père Chenu of being the father of liberation theology, the same one I credit as being the father of Creation Spirituality. Gustavo Gutiérrez says, *Knowledge is not the conformity of the mind to be given, but an immersion in the process of transformation and construction of a new world*. Transformation and construction of a new world. That is the Via Transformativa, where it is imbued and nourished and enlivened by the Via Creativa by the awakening, the resurrection of our imaginations.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.