

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

Thin places

- Pastor Hank French

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him (Psalms 62:5).*

Be still and know that I am God (Psalms 46:10).

We do not live in a world that places much value on silence, stillness or solitude. We live in a noisy world, one full of distractions, a world in constant motion where we are pushed and pulled in a hundred different directions at the same time. We are inundated with social media; we are hardly ever “alone” or “silent” thanks to email, cell phones, text messages, video calls, zoom meetings. To say that many, if not most, folks are stressed out is not an exaggeration. And we are the worse for it.

Amid the infinite distractions and demands of a noisy, always on the go world, it is all too easy to lose sight of God, to lose touch with God, to forget about God. It doesn't have to be that way.

Some 45 years ago, during my first year living in Japan, I began the ancient practice of contemplative prayer—also known as the prayer of silence, the prayer of the heart, centering prayer. You could simply call it Christian meditation.

Shortly after beginning the practice, I attended a 10-day silent retreat led by a Jesuit priest who was a professor at a Catholic university in Tokyo, and that retreat became for me a “thin place,” a place where the boundary between the natural and divine became so “thin” that the natural and the divine seemed to interpenetrate one another.

Up until then, I had spent most of my life thinking about God, reading about God, always wanting to know more about God. During that silent retreat, for the first time in my life, I experienced God.

The Sufi poet, Rumi, once wrote: “There is a place where words are born of silence, A place where the whispers of the heart arise.” He was describing a thin place.

We all need such places, thin places where nothing gets in the way of the solitude and silence and simplicity within which our words of love and praise and thanksgiving to God are born and spoken.

We all need such places, thin places where nothing gets in the way of the solitude and silence and simplicity within which God “whispers” in our hearts and we know that we are not alone.

There is a hermitage retreat center in Isanti County called Pacem in Terris, Latin for Peace on Earth. It is a thin place for me. I go there, usually once in the fall and once in the spring, for a week or so of silence and solitude. I spend the days practicing contemplative prayer and walking meditatively through forest trails. When I leave to return to the day-by-day world and its responsibilities and relationships, the inner silence and sense of God's loving presence goes with me. When the noise and distractions of the world begin to encroach on that inner silence and dull my sense of God's

presence, I simply return to Pacem in Terris, my thin place, to be silent and alone with God for a while. In the words of that old Alka-Seltzer commercial: "Try it; you'll like it."

Prayer: Draw me, Holy one, to thin places where we can converse in silence, solitude and simplicity. Amen.