

Embodying prayer . . . A story

In many spiritual traditions of the world, the body is viewed with fear and suspicion, considered to be the seat of desire that must be trained and brought into submission.

However our bodies bring unique perceptive gifts, the most important of which is the capacity to understand the language of faith encoded in sacred gesture. Praying with a prayer rope, a holding cross or a labyrinth ball is holy movement.

A famous story attributed to Russian Orthodox archbishop Anthony Bloom makes this point. A young man came to him for spiritual consultation, angry and distressed because he couldn't make any sense out of his Christianity.

The dogma and theology seemed balderdash, and frequently made him furious. He yearned for a life of faith. . What did Father Anthony suggest?

Anthony listened intently and then made a rather surprising suggestion: that the young man simply go home and make one hundred full prostrations a day for a month.

In Orthodox practice a full prostration is not a simple bob-and-curtsy, as genuflection tends to be in the West. One goes flat out on the floor, face down, with arms outstretched; holds the position for at least a good long in-and-out breath; and then slowly rises to one's feet.

When he returned a month later, the young man's eyes were glowing with faith, no longer frustrated or angry.

The reason, as the Anthony knew full well, is that through the deep, rhythmic gestures of bowing and emptying himself, the man came to understand something that could not be found by the mind. It lived in his body. In connecting with his body, he reconnected with the wellsprings of his faith.

God is like the air we breathe. Perhaps that is why the deeper we grow in the prayerful awareness of the Divine presence in our lives, the less we actually say with words

and the more we simply breathe and enjoy it.

How does an apple green, ripen? It just sits in the sun.

Thomas Merton

Growth, labyrinth prayer sphere

We have our beginning in the love of God. God made you. God adores you, God keeps you. The spiritual journey is growing in the transforming nature of these three truths. It's a journey of becoming the beloved.

We are so preciously loved by God that we cannot even comprehend it. God loved us before we were made, and this love has never diminished and never will.

God's intention for us is to go find God in this Holy life of hide and seek to ask, knock see, touch, taste our way to the holy hidden heart of God.

It is not merely our own desire but the desire of Jesus that draws us to want to grow in love. A desire which is poured out in us by the strong, living Spirit of God.

We are small creatures, Our lives are not long, but long enough to learn.

Nature demonstrates how we grow and are created to transform. Our inner faith like nature has seasons; active spring brings shoots of new growth, bright flying summers of flowering and fruit, falling autumns of change, withdrawing winters of hiddenness, resting, restoration and retreat.

God is the Lord of the changing seasons of our life.

To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name.

Thomas Merton

There is only one problem which all of my existence, my peace, my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find God

Thomas Merton

How does an apple ripen ? It just sits in the sun

Thomas Merton



Green and greening ,Viriditas

Green as a colour represents growth, we often talk of having green fingers, a green thumb or God's green earth. The greening power of nature is a metaphor for physical and spiritual growth and health.

Someone who has given rich insight into this was Hildegard von Bingen, a Christian mystic, musician, abbess, writer, poet, visionary, and polymath who lived in 12th-century Germany.

A cornerstone of Hildegard's spirituality was Viriditas, or greening power, her revelation of the animating lush divine life force manifested in the natural world that infuses all creation with moisture and vitality.

To her, the Trinity was clear in every leaf and blade of grass. Creation revealed the face of the invisible creator. She celebrated the sacred in nature, something highly relevant for us in this age of climate change.

Green power represents the work of the Holy Spirit in all of us

The definition of Viriditas is both literal, as in "green", "greenness", and "growth", yet also metaphorical, as in "vigour", "verdure", "freshness" and "vitality."

For Hildegard, the spiritual aspects were just as essential as the physical meaning. In much of her work, viriditas was "the greening power of God." It was in everything, including humans.

Greening power



This "greenness" was an expression of heaven, the creative power of life, which can be witnessed in the gardens, forests, and farmland all around us. And like those lands, she saw viriditas as something to be cultivated in both our bodies and our souls.

Green, she taught, is more than a colour nature wraps herself in. Green power represents the work of the Holy Spirit in all of us. That which turns leaves and plants green in the spring also runs in our hearts. A life force not unlike the sap of a tree.

These are truths that have to descend from our heads to our hearts , from our minds to our bodies. Your body is God's temple, that the Trinity lives in.

Embodying Prayer

Prayer is something we embody ,something we touch, feel, do , as much, if not more than something we say.

Walking and movement on the labyrinth offers us spiritual insights in a way that the intellectual mind simply cannot.

With your prayer labyrinth ball, your prayers can now literally be "all fingers and thumbs", in a positive way, you are embodying your prayers. Intentionally following the labyrinths prayer route.

Embodying Prayer, a contemplative meditation, Being who you are

Please to use the words of the following song (found online at www.jimbailey.org) as you hold the labyrinth ball and contemplating and circumnavigate its route, holding and waiting as you feel with the words...

The heart is the place we are most ourselves, it's the centre of our being
solitude and silence are the pathways there, it's where the beloved's meet
father up and father in to find your true identity.

Made with love for a heart to heart you were named before the stars
to be who you are

You were shaped in love first inside then out woven in the secret place
all of your hours spread out and prepared before you'd even lived one day

Your uniqueness is your gift you were born in heaven's heart
you are held in God's very thought you have been carried this far
to be who you are

Your soul was made to bloom blossom and unfold In this broken earth
Your spirit was made to soar to unfurl and fly In this wild whirling sky

Journey in this fragile skin where the scars now bear the gold
Your true beauty is there's only one of you and you have come so very far
becoming who you are

Thank you Father I'm Perfected in your love
I rest in you for the days ahead Thank you Jesus for your untamed grace

I can never be the same Thank you Spirit, for the way
You reveal and heal my heart On this path you have brought me so far
So I give you all my thanks
for being Who you are.

You, just as you are, and your life here, right now,
are all there is and all you need to know.

You don't have to do anything special.

Mostly, you have to be open to meeting face to face,
and even dancing with, the truth that pertains to your life
right now.

You have to find a way to collect your
fractured pieces, examine them,
and accept them as part of who you are.

Spiritual practice is about transformation, but it's also,
and more importantly, about working with what is.

angel Kyodo Williams



Blessed are those who are willing to enter into the process of being healed,
for they will become healers.

Blessed are those who recognise their own inner violence,
for they will come to know nonviolence.

Blessed are those who can forgive themselves,
for they will become forgivers.

Blessed are those who are willing to let go of selfishness
and self-centredness,
for they will become a healing presence.

Blessed are those who listen with compassion,
for they will become compassionate.

Blessed are those who are willing to enter into conflict,
for they will find resolutions.

Blessed are those who know their interdependence with all of creation,
for they will become unifiers.

Blessed are those who live a contemplative life stance,
for they will find God in all things.

Blessed are those who strive to live these beatitudes,
for they will become reconcilers.

Sisters of St. Joseph, Concordia, Kansas

Meditations on growing in God's love, the transforming journey from fear to love



With the labyrinth prayer ball, your prayer can now literally be “all fingers and thumbs”, in a good fresh way! Intentionally following the labyrinths prayer route. You are ‘doing’ prayer, working with your roots by following the routes embodying prayer, trusting the metamorphosis, that you are becoming prayer itself.

Find a quiet space where you can't be disturbed. Turn off/ mute your phone. As you read a meditation, you may find a phrase or word that ‘sticks’. Take that phrase or word and hold it with intention in your head, your heart, your body.

Holding that word/phrase slowly trace the cyclical route of the labyrinth. When you get to the centre rest and wait a while, on the phrase/word. Slowly retrace the way back. Trust God's transformation work in you. There is no wrong way or right way to hold and pray these meditations. Go with the way that resonates with you.

The following collection of meditative readings have had and and continue to have a profound impact on my own spirituality and life. I have found they relate to the human condition and the spiritual life.

They have been humbly used with those seeking a deeper transformation from fear to love, from self rejection to self kindness and self compassion from doubt fear and indifference to a loving tacit trust that we are not left alone but welcomed and embraced to rest on the breast of Jesus breast and feel the heartbeat of God.



When tears come, I breathe deeply and rest. I know I am swimming in a hallowed stream where many have gone before. I am not alone, crazy, or having a nervous breakdown...My heart is at work, my soul is awake.

Mary Margaret Funk

As soon as we are alone,...inner chaos opens up in us. This chaos can be so disturbing and so confusing that we can hardly wait to get busy again. Entering a private room and shutting the door, therefore, does not mean that we immediately shut out all our inner doubts, anxieties, fears, bad memories, unresolved conflicts, angry feelings and impulsive desires.

On the contrary, when we have removed our outer distractions, we often find that our inner distractions manifest themselves to us in full force. We often use outer distractions to shield ourselves from interior noises. This makes the discipline of solitude all the more important.

Henri Nouwen the inner voice



Many consumerist economies stay afloat by manipulating the low self-esteem of their consumers and by creating spiritual expectations through material means.



Richard Rhor

Here is the God I want to believe in: a Father who, from the beginning of creation, has stretched out his arms in merciful blessing, never forcing himself on anyone, but always waiting; never letting his arms drop down in despair, but always hoping that his children will return so that he can speak words of love to them and let his tired arms rest on their shoulders. His only desire is to bless.



Henri Nouwen

The story of the prodigal son is the story of a God who goes searching for me and who doesn't rest until he has found me.



Henri Nouwen

Be open to the night...

Pray with open hand, not with clenched fist...

Shapes loom out of the darkness, uncertain and unclear: but the hooded stranger on horseback emerging from the mist need not be assumed to be the bearer of ill...

The night is large and full of wonders...

Lord Dunsany

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realised that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not "How am I to find God?" but "How am I to let myself be found by him?" The question is not "How am I to know God?" but "How am I to let myself be known by God?" And, finally, the question is not "How am I to love God?" but "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*



For most of my life, I have struggled to find God, know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair God is looking for you. He will go anywhere to find you. He loves you, he wants you home, he cannot rest unless he has you with him.



Henri Nouwen

One of the greatest challenges of the spiritual life is to receive God's forgiveness.



Richard Rohr

Receiving forgiveness requires a total willingness to let God be God and do all the healing, restoring, and renewing.



Richard Rohr

"When tears come, I breathe deeply and rest. I know I am swimming in a hallowed stream where many have gone before. I am not alone, crazy, or having a nervous breakdown... My heart is at work, my soul is awake.



Mary Margaret Funk

Most of us were taught that God would love us if and when we change. In fact, God loves you so that you can change. What empowers change, what makes you desirous of change is the experience of love. It is that inherent experience of love that becomes the engine of change.

Richard Rohr