

THE MONASTIC WAY

...daily insights to stir the heart and seed the soul.

LET NOTHING DISTURB

These are not easy times. For any of us.

The social climate—in both church and state—is more fraught than the world has seen in years. In the state, the political forces are almost equally divided within a few percentage points of each other. Some see socialism coming; others fear a new kind of fascism is on its way.

In the churches, tensions collect around people who see “Tradition” with a capital “T”—meaning the basic message of the faith,” and people who spell “tradition” with a lower case “t”—meaning the way we did things when I was a kid.

Hardly a single denomination has been spared the unease that comes with vastly new insights into society, amazing new possibilities technologically, astounding new changes in lifestyle and beliefs that come as roles change and institutions reconfigure and goals shift and authority moves out of board-rooms and spills out into the streets, the blogs and the new social media. Now everyone is involved in great new democratic discussions. Now everyone has an opinion. And everyone has a chance to have a say. The timbers of old-order structures are creaking and groaning toward the breaking point.

Clearly something is out of divine order.

Post-modernism—the point in a society when the questions of the present period can no longer be convincingly answered by the positions taken in the period before it—tilts and tips from one side to another in the search for synthesis and mutual understanding and clarity of Christian thought.

So how can a person possibly get through a time such as this? And what of those of us who have been caught in between in a climate such as this?

The photograph in this month’s Monastic Way gives us a glimpse of an answer: it is a study in calm that invites us to find a place beyond the clamor of the city, its institutions, its struggle for dominance or its grappling for emergence. We must find that quiet,



PHOTOGRAPHER

centered, stable, immovable place within where God is still God and no plan or project or imperial force can be allowed to take God’s place.

We must find the Spirit within us that promises the courage we need, that assures us of the peace that comes beyond the cross, that brings us back to the values that really count: nature, relationships, dailiness and the Presence of God in everything and everyone. And most of all, within ourselves.

It is called “serenity,” this assurance that there is something bigger than all these things that must ultimately prevail because it is right and true. We must remember that, down deep where it counts, we are harbored within it and it cannot be shaken and it is taking us home. Wherever and whatever that may be. All we need to do is to keep going, keep calm, keep believing, keep moving toward the goal while we keep our eyes on the God within and, oh yes, by all means, keep fishing.



THURSDAY, JUNE 1: Interior peace is not achieved by not struggling for things worth struggling for; it is achieved by not giving up the struggle for the sake of making a false peace.

FRIDAY, JUNE 2: When we know that something must be done to right a wrong but we ignore it in order to avoid the struggle, no peace comes. Then we are left only with a sense of the betrayal of the better self. There is nothing peaceful about that. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

SATURDAY, JUNE 3: Serenity is the ability to sit through a storm without giving way to the fear that the rain may never end.

SUNDAY, JUNE 4: The person who lives in perfect inner peace simply cannot be moved by force or fear to accept anything less than the truth about the reality at hand.

MONDAY, JUNE 5: Serenity requires an honest admixture of equality and respect for those who hold opposite positions from our own.

TUESDAY, JUNE 6: A false peace occurs when one party to a negotiation talks nicely but gives no ground. The words sound serene but their purpose is simply to label one person's attempt to dominate as the other person's delusion.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7: Real peace cannot be shaken by disagreement. Real peace clings to an ongoing truth, however much pressure is applied to forego it.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8: Serenity—inner calm and implacability—cannot be destroyed. In the end, what is true will prevail because those who are certain of soul are not able to be harried out of existence. As Reinhold Niebuhr teaches us to pray, "God grant me the serenity to accept

the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

FRIDAY, JUNE 9: It is serenity that walks us through all the changes of life. The serene person is full of the courage to let life happen in all its forms until it is possible to see clearly what must be pruned, what must be purged and what must be allowed to pursue its own perfection so that we may all grow with it.

*But you shall not
Be overcome and
all shall be well.
Yes, all shall be well,
and all will be well,
and thou shall
see thyself that all
manner of things
shall be well."*

SATURDAY, JUNE 10: No matter what goes on around us, the only way to weather the pain of it is to create within ourselves the kind of spiritual cave that can transcend the clamor in which we live. As the graffiti artist puts it: Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm.

SUNDAY, JUNE 11: Just because every institution of our time is shaken with unrest does not mean that we must be shaken, too. It only means that our souls must be unshakably serene while everything around us tips and sways. "Observe the wonders as they occur around you," Rumi says. "Don't claim them. Feel the artistry moving through and be silent."

MONDAY, JUNE 12: "As soon as you have made a thought," Lao Tzu says, "laugh at it." Then, knowing that all ideas come and go in their time, you will be serene in the midst of the melee, however deep the soulshake.

TUESDAY, JUNE 13: Approach everything in life as changeable, malleable and movable. Then nothing can capture your inner self or put it in chains. As the world moves around you, you, too, will grow.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14: Never assume that any great threat to your life can destroy you. It can change your circumstances, yes, but only you can destroy you.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15: Recognize danger and compose yourself to deal with it. But do not fear it. Nothing and no one has power over us unless we ourselves give it to them.

FRIDAY, JUNE 16: If we do not run from something—if we face it down and refuse to surrender to it—it must sometime go away dried up, dwarfed and defeated. As Longfellow says, "The best thing one can do when it is raining is to let it rain."

SATURDAY, JUNE 17: Is something threatening you? Laugh at it and keep on doing exactly what you're doing. Nothing diminishes a bully faster than to measure his nothingness with a laugh.

SUNDAY, JUNE 18: Serenity is the refusal to be overcome by something with less stature of soul than yourself. As Yogi Berra puts it, "Ninety percent of this game is half mental."

MONDAY, JUNE 19: Serenity is not a decision to let evil flourish or wrong win. It is a decision to struggle for something greater than what is however long it takes. Thomas Merton writes: "Christ did not come to bring peace to the world as a kind of spiritual tranquilizer. He brought to his disciples a vocation and a task—to struggle in the world of violence to establish his peace not only in their own heart but in society itself."

TUESDAY, JUNE 20: Serenity is the ability to give our lives for something greater than ourselves, knowing that in the end justice must surely

come, but only if we refuse to give in to oppression.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21: Serenity is not the ability to accommodate to wrongs; it is the ability to point them out without apology. “Not to be angered by injustice,” Eknath Easwaran writes, “is a lack of sensitivity.”

THURSDAY, JUNE 22: To adjust to evil is to become it ourselves.

FRIDAY, JUNE 23: Serenity is the ability to live through turmoil unruffled. Then no amount of turmoil can destroy us.

SATURDAY, JUNE 24: If we become hysterical, mean, helpless in the threat of difficulty, what will happen to us when difficulty finally descends?

SUNDAY, JUNE 25: Surrender your equanimity to no one. To be less than strong in the face of threat will be precisely what will defeat you in the end. Julian of Norwich reminds us always, “You will have pain and affliction, trouble and strain and doubt. But you shall not be overcome and all shall be well. Yes,

all shall be well, and all will be well, and thou shall see thyself that all manner of things shall be well.”

Real peace cannot be shaken by disagreement. Real peace clings to an ongoing truth, however much pressure is applied to forego it.

MONDAY, JUNE 26: Serenity is not surrender to forces that have no right to oppress us. It is to refuse to surrender to the unacceptable. It is the ability to persist in the cause of justice despite any amount of opposition. Helen Keller says of such a situation, “I do not want peace which passes understanding. I want the understanding which brings peace.”

TUESDAY, JUNE 27: To be able to be the source of calm and joy in the midst of crisis is to stir timid souls to life again. “Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile,” Thich Nhat Hanh says, “but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.”

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28: Serenity is the kind of soufulness that can remain both strong and joyful in the midst of suffering. Again, we look to the insight of Thich Nhat Hanh, “Don’t wait until you have no more suffering before allowing yourself to be happy.”

THURSDAY, JUNE 29: There are times in life when the struggles we face—sickness, loss, opposition—are constants. Then is exactly the time to live beyond their reach. Or as Shantideva says, “If there’s a remedy when trouble strikes/What reason is there for dejection?/And if there is no help for it,/What use is there in being glum?”

FRIDAY, JUNE 30: To refuse to be defeated by those who would control us, limit our right to think, or make us lackeys of useless ideas long-gone is the great strength of serenity. There is nothing that can change it, nothing that can conquer it, nothing that can overcome it. We can be forced to do anything but believe and what we refuse to believe can never prevail.



LET’S SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

The following discussion questions, Scripture echo, journal prompts, and prayer are meant to help you reflect more deeply on *The Monastic Way*. Choose at least two suggestions and respond to them. You may do it as a personal practice or gather a group interested in sharing the spiritual journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the following story and decide whether you think true serenity and peace exists in this monastery:

High in the mountains on the border between two countries at war with each other in the monastery of the Monks of Eternal Bliss. Every night bombers fly over the monastery and during the day soldiers fight in the valley, but the monastery is never touched, and the monks continue to pray and meditate and work without interruption.

Circle YES or NO and explain your choice. Use some of the ideas in this month’s Monastic Way to illustrate your points.

2. Which daily quote in *The Monastic Way* is most meaningful to you? Why? Do you agree with it? Disagree? Did it inspire you? Challenge you? Raise questions for you?

3. After reading *The Monastic Way* write one question that you would like to ask the author about this month’s topic.

4. Joan Chittister uses other literature to reinforce and expand her writing. Find another quote, poem, story, song, art piece, novel that echoes the theme of this month’s Monastic Way.

5. In the midst of the turmoil and chaos of daily life, Sister Joan suggests that we “create within ourselves the kind of spiritual cave that can transcend the clamor in which we live.” Do you have such a “cave”? Explain.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Prompt 1: Here are a few statements from this month's *Monastic Way*. Choose one that is most helpful to you and journal with it.

- Nothing and no one has power over us unless we ourselves give it to them.
- Serenity—inner calm and implacability— cannot be destroyed.
- “God give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, to courage to change what I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” - Reinhold Niebuhr

Prompt 2: Spend a few minutes with this photograph and journal about its relationship to this month's *Monastic Way*. You can do that with prose or a poem or a song or....



PHOTOGRAPHER

SCRIPTURE ECHO

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

- Colossians 3:15

What does thankfulness have to do with peace, in your experience?

PRAYER

You will have pain and affliction, trouble and strain and doubt. But you shall not be overcome and all shall be well. Yes, all shall be well, and all will be well, and you shall see yourself that all manner of things shall be well.

— Julian of Norwich

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“Prisoners are the most forgotten people in society and the least served in Christianity. Help me change that.”
—Joan Chittister

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JOAN CHITTISTER is an internationally known author and lecturer and a clear visionary voice across all religions. She has written more than 60 books and received numerous awards for her writings and work on behalf of peace and women in the church and in society.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Each month, join the staff of Benetvision on a free Zoom call to discuss the current issue of *The Monastic Way*. Several times each year, Sister Joan leads the Zoom session. Subscribers will receive invitations to register for these calls in their email inbox.

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355 East 9th St
Erie PA 16503-1107
T: 814-459-5994
benetvision@benetvision.org

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