

Daily Meditation 01/31/2022

Thich Nhat Hanh and Thomas Aquinas on Joy

Morning.

We continue our meditations on Thich Nhat Hanh and Thomas Aquinas. And they agree on so many things.

A couple days ago we shared Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness, contemplation. And also those of Thomas Aquinas on the three steps, really four, that he lays out for experiencing wisdom and contemplation and play. He says the nearest word to contemplation is play, playing with wisdom.

And today they add out another important theme that they both discourse on, and live, try to live out, and that is the theme of joy, and what is derived from experience of compassion, that joy is bigger than suffering.

The late Rabbi Zalman Schachter used to say, "There's more good than evil in the world, but not by much." So I think is a realistic assessment. And sometimes it's easy to forget the joy when there is so much bad news in the air.

And this is why we need to call on our great wisdom figures to recover that sense of joy. And joy is multiplying, because as Meister Eckert says, "What happens to another, whether it be joy or a sorrow, happens to me."

So we share one another's joy. That's what celebration's about; that's what community's about. And this multiplies our own. We have to be looking for it, to be hunting and gathering for the joy in the world.

And the source of joy--both Aquinas and Thich Nhat Hanh agree on this--is love. And the way Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, in today's reading, is that the Buddha resides in all of us. And, as he says, children recognize this. The Buddha is in themselves.

Well, in the West, I hope it's true, too, that in the Christian tradition, children learn that the Christ resides in them, not just in some alter place, or some saint beyond themselves.

And as Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, "The Buddha should be smiling, happy, beautiful for the sake of our children." And we can begin each day, as he says, by reminding ourselves that we are a Buddha.

He says, "Each time we feel ourselves about to leave our Buddha, we can sit and breathe until we return to our true self. The true self is the Buddha in us."

Well, this can be said of the Christ, also, that our true self is the Christ in us. And we are all other Christs.

Jesus taught in Matthew 25, but also great saints like Sister Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton, and, of course, Meister Eckhart. All tell us that, as do other Christians who have taken the deep journey to the true self and the underground river.

And of course, Aquinas says that it's love that produces joy. That's why there is joy. He says, "Love and joy constitute the basis of all attraction. Love is the origin. Joy is the end result."

Love is the origin; joy is the end result.

So there's this journey that the love triggers, and that culminates in joy. Or as Jesus said, "By their fruits, you will know them." And among the fruits is joy. It's exactly what Thich Nhat Hanh is saying about finding the Buddha. And, of course, Thich Nhat Hanh also applies it to Christ, explicitly, when he says that when he looks on people, he sees both Jesus there and the Buddha there. And all of it can bring us joy when we get back in touch with it.

And of course, Thich Nhat Hanh is invoking an "I am" poem in the poem that I shared today in the essay. And of course the "I Am" is another way of talking about the Christ or the Buddha which is in all of us.

And we're not being told that only Jesus is the good shepherd, or the vine, but we all are. That's what the teaching of the Cosmic Christ is. How are you a good shepherd? How are you a vine? How are you living bread for others? All this is the teaching of Cosmic Christ, which is also the I Am sayings in the Gospels.

Plenty of room for joy. That's why Aquinas says, "Joy is a human's noblest act."

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.