

## Daily Meditation 01/26/22

### Thich Nhat Hanh on the Meaning of the Christian Liturgy

Good morning.

Today we continue to meditate with Thich Nhat Hanh, and with a special focus on the depths of his deep ecumenism. And he really went to great lengths to understand other religions such as Christianity, spent many years after all in France, and being Vietnamese, of a nation that had been colonized by the French, he was not at all ignorant of Christianity, even in his own world, before the war, before he left his country.

But I think what he tells us today about the Eucharist or the liturgy, in the Christian tradition, is so right on, it's so accurate, and so deep, as I say, I think he outdistances lots of Christians, including theologians, and clergy, in his deep understanding of what's really going on, that it's not just a memorial of the Jesus who lived and died 2000 years ago; it is also a banquet, a sharing of the Cosmic Christ, which is the Christ that is alive in all beings, in all light.

As John I says, Christ is the Light in all beings, and is therefore the food of the universe, the whole universe, the cosmos, becomes our food in this ritual ceremony.

And Thich Nhat Hanh puts that very directly in his language:

*Take, my friends, this is my flesh, this is my blood, can there be any more drastic language in order to wake us up? What could Jesus have said that is any better than that?*

Again, he sees the purpose of this banquet: to wake us up. And he ends it that way too: "You eat it in such a way that you come alive, truly alive."

So in that succinct and short paragraph, I think he absolutely summarizes what the effort is in this particular ceremony: to wake us up. But in doing so, of course, he's bringing in his entire philosophy of interbeing and interconnection, because as he says, to eat bread is to eat the whole cosmos: to eat the sunlight that makes bread; the soil that makes bread; the rain and the clouds that make bread possible. And of course, human ingenuity, that converts wheat to bread.

So there is this immense cosmic banquet going on, that he is excited about. And he recognizes there a presence of the Divine. And he said -- and notice what he says, this is a Buddhist talking, a Buddhist monk talking:

"If Christ is the body of God, which he is, then the bread he offers is also the body of the cosmos."

So this is the body of the cosmos. That's what it means to eat the Eucharist, you were eating the cosmos. So again, they have to move Christian theology from just the historical Jesus, and certainly from a private tete-a-tete with Jesus, to the Cosmic Christ, that all creation is being brought together in this event.

Now, time and time again, in his philosophy, Thich Nhat Hanh not only talks about God as the Ground of Being, but he also emphasizes the whole dimension of the interdependence of all things. He invented this word interbeing to summarize that in one sentence.

Now, I want to point out again, that Meister Eckhart says, "All creatures are interdependent," quote, unquote. So the pre-modern mystics understood what Thich Nhat Hanh is saying and trying to say. It was Eckhart who said, "What happens to another, whether it be joy or sorrow, happens to me." So he draws this behavioral ethic and morality out of our interrelationship, and that is to say that all beings share both joy and sorrow, grief.

And Eckhart is not alone: Hildegard of Bingen, 100 years before him, said: "Everything that is in the heavens, everything on earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness."

Again, this is deeply Buddhist. And it is embedded in our deepest Western traditions by our greatest creation mystics. And Hildegard also draws the lesson of compassion from this, as does Thich Nhat Hanh, and as does Meister Eckhart. She says, "Creation blooms and flourishes when it remains in right relationship and keeps to its assigned tasks."

And Thomas Merton, Thich Nhat Hanh's close friend, in the last talk he ever gave, three hours before he died, said that "Compassion is a keen awareness of the interdependence of all living beings, that are all part of one another and involved in one another."

That's not just good mysticism. It is also good science, that all things are interdependent. But we need to practice that, and that practice is called compassion.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.