

Daily Meditation 08-27-22

Speaking of Praise, Rilke Again

Good morning.

We've been meditating recently on the dialectic between the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*, between praise and grief and suffering. And the great poet Rilke, about whom Robert Bly said he was a greatest poet in the last 500 years, says, you will recall, that "we should walk our walk of lament on a path of praise."

And in today's meditation we are following up on that insight from Rilke with another gift from him, where he's talking about his own vocation as a poet.

Oh, tell us poet, what do you do?

I praise.

But the deadly and the violent days? How do you undergo them? Take them in --

See, how do you bring the suffering and evil into your work of praise? His answer:

I praise.

But the namelessness-- How do you raise that, invoke the unnameable?--

...things that are so beyond the pale, as we say, that they're beyond naming? His answer:

I praise.

What right have you, through every phase, in every mask, to remain true?

I praise.

-- and that both stillness and the wild afraid, know you like star and storm?

Because I praise.

...because I praise.

So you get in this amazing poem how praise is the final word, the first and final word, the *via positiva*, that holds it all together. All the suffering and the stillness is part of the *via negativa*, and the wildness of life, the stars and storms.

All of it is embraced by the praise.

Now as I point out, Rilke did not have an easy childhood at all. It forced him to go very deep, I think, into his soul and define these truths.

And Mary Oliver, who called herself a praise poet, also had a very, very difficult childhood. She was sexually abused by her father. And it took her, as she said, years to get her life back after she left home the day she graduated from high school and never returned.

But after these years of inner work, dealing with the suffering, the brokenness, she, like Rilke, emerged, found her vocation to praise, and calls herself a praise poet.

It's very important that both of these praise poets, Rilke and Oliver, did not come from a happy and perfect childhood. But they went deep. And they learned a deep lesson: that praise is the first and the last word.

And then we have this amazing statement from Meister Eckhart that I've been meditating on for over 20 years. It's so hard, it's so stark, it's so shocking.

Everything praises God, darkness, privations, defects, evil too, praise God and bless God.

How is that possible?

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.