

Daily Meditation 05/09/2023

## A Story of Healing Acedia and Depression Sans Pills

Good morning.

We continue our meditations on joy and its opposite, that which interferes with joy, such as acedia. Remember that Thomas Aquinas says "Joy is a human's noblest act."

So developing our capacity for our noblest act, for taking in, for receiving the gifts of joy. And joy is considered a gift of the Spirit in the Christian tradition. And that means it's available to all of us. And of course, one of Christ's promises was peace and joy.

So I relayed yesterday's story about how last week I was kind of attacked by a psychologist for bringing up acedia, and she seemed to think that psychology and the giving of pills was kind of your only way to heal sadness.

And I'm pointing out that, of course, people get severely abused and so forth. And in many other arenas, psychology can be very useful. But taking pills, a physiological approach to psychology, is not exclusive.

I think there are many other approaches that are very valuable. Certainly that of Jung, and that of Otto Rank, and others. Disciples of Rank, like the humanistic psychologists, Maslow and Rollo May and so forth, Carl Rogers.

Rollo May once came to our program, and I'll never forget his talk because the opening sentence went like this. He said, "If Abraham Lincoln were alive today, he would be diagnosed as in severe depression, and we would give him pills."

I guess that's partly behind my objection to the idea among some psychologists today, that depression is just a physiologic problem that can be addressed with pills.

It can be partially a physiologic problem. But I'm talking about the bigger picture. And as I point out in today's meditation, that society itself can be depression-making. In fact, if we're not feeling some depression when things are really bad, like today, you're probably not paying attention.

So I refer to Barbara Ehrenreich, who is a brilliant human being. And in her books, she talks about this epidemic of depression that hit Europe in the 17th century, and with it came a rash of suicides. And she says, quote, "An anxious self emerged--"

...an anxious self...

"...that transformed the individual into a kind of walled fortress, carefully defended from everyone else."

So I think this happens when science and religion split, when spirituality and the cosmos are no longer connecting, when psyche and spirit need to connect.

That is why healthy ritual brings those together. Otto Rank says that all healthy rituals are about bringing psyche and Cosmos together. So this is so important: healthy culture needs these healthy rituals and they accomplish something, they bring psyche, the individual, and the whole together again.

Otto Rank also said the ultimate healing for humans is the Unio Mystica, the mystical union. He didn't say there was a pill, because our problems are not just physiological; they're not just in the brain, they're in our souls. If you admit we have souls, which of course, many psychologists don't know the word "psychology" means the of our souls.

So this is all part of acedia, the sadness, as Aquinas says, the sadness about divine things, that we feel something is missing in our souls. And that's why we spend so much effort trying to fill this vacuum, with drugs, with alcohol, with all kinds of addictions.

And so I think we are dealing with something very real when we're talking about acedia. And I don't think we should throw it overboard.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.