

## Daily Meditation 7-28-25

### Fighting Despair with Action: A Fruit Tree Planting Project in Nepal

Good morning.

This morning, I'd like to speak to you about two topics. One is the essay, the daily meditation for today, Monday, which is a letter that I received from Marianne Grosspietsch, whom I've written about before, and who has started a movement for orphans in Tibet. They do wonderful work there with these orphans, and there are a lot of them, due to earthquakes and so forth and poverty. And this latest project, as she points out, is about getting the orphans to plant trees. And they don't plant just tiny plants, but trees that are already well along, and they cost \$10 apiece.

But as she points out, they're good for the environment, they absorb the CO<sub>2</sub>, and they hold water. They retain the soil. They are nesting places for birds that eat the bugs, and above all, they fight hunger. Because these are fruit trees that have essential vitamins. And it's important to realize that there are places in the world, especially poor places where people do not have access to fruit trees, or to buy fruit, because they are so poor.

And of course, the whole letter is wrapped in the realization that the USAID project that was dropped by the administration suddenly, is profoundly affecting places of poverty such as Nepal. And so I think it's important to get these letters from the front lines, about the hope people are feeling about this -- people outside the US are feeling -- about losing their support they were getting from us for years. And again, she entitles her letter, "let us not give up despite the Antichrist's painful activities."

So I think this is a very important appeal. I hope that many of you can respond generously again, just \$10 allows one of these trees to really flourish. And it's wonderful work for the kids, of course, to learn how to plant trees, and to understand the importance of trees for our own survival. How friendly trees have been to our species, and necessary over the centuries.

So that is a topic to bring to your attention. But I also want to talk about my daily meditation beginning tomorrow, on Tuesday, and that is, I want to talk about the theme of holiness. And there are two reasons why, if you will, two things that inspired me in that regard recently. One is, of course, being with Joanna Macy again, and her passing, and being with many people whom she has affected and moved as a mentor over the years.

And Gianluigi wrote about the importance of mentorship this past week in one of his daily meditations. I was very grateful for that. And he alluded there to how, with his encouragement, this book that I'm finishing up on my mentor, Père Chenu, a wonderful Dominican theologian, whom I studied with in Paris in 1968, the last class he taught, actually -- he was 76 at the time -- how this book that I've written is really a book on mentorship in many respects. Because he really was my mentor. He named the Creation Spirituality tradition for me. And he lived it in so full a way. And he was a tremendous force at the Second Vatican Council.

Before, he really set the agenda for it: a book he wrote in 1937 on *Reinventing Theology*, was in so many ways the manual for the Second Vatican Council 25 years later. But he himself takes up that theme of holiness. And his specialty as an historian, he was a very renowned historian, was the 12th century, 12th and 13th.

And he says that was essentially the best Renaissance in the West, one renaissance that was grassroots, and did not come from top down like the 16th century Renaissance -- from the bottom up, from the freed serfs and young people, women and the peasants of the Middle Ages. And it's a very powerful thesis.

But one of his points about the 12th century Renaissance, is this whole question of sanctity, holiness. He says, "Ideals of sanctity altered in the 12th century Renaissance. There were new examples of sanctity, new exemplars of sanctity." There is a sense of a joyful sanctity.

And he says that "At the Second Vatican Council, in the declaration called *Lumen Gentium*, there is a 'universal call to human holiness.'" So again, the question of sanctity, holiness, is on my mind because Joanna Macy's passing was obviously a very holy woman.

And I'm very interested in this topic, because, as Chenu says, that "holiness itself evolves. It has a history. And different times of history will have different emphases, different meanings, even, and different expressions." And one of the emphases he makes is that holiness is a group thing. It's a community thing. See, it's not just an individual thing. It's not about the holiness just of individuals, but of a rising (that's what a Renaissance is, the rising) and solidarity of a people with Justice first, who put Joy first, who put peace and creativity first and so forth: that the way to make people holy is to create a society that allows the best of us to flourish. What he calls our nobility. That's really his definition of spirituality, our authentic nobility. So I want to explore this with you.

And one question I had on Joanna Macy's passing was, "wow," I said to myself, "how many other saintly people have I known in my life?" So I took out a pen and pencil and I jotted down, in a day or two, 33 different people whom I would call saints -- in today's version of holiness, not necessarily yesterday's -- they weren't saints because they were pious, but saints because they were generous, because they were joyful, and because they cared about the suffering in the world. They put justice ahead of injustice. They were generous people.

I'm thinking right now of Anita Roddick, who helped to reinvent business. She's the founder of The Body Shop. And she was one of the first women to really create her own business, and started in a garage in San Francisco, actually, in the late 60s. But she went out of her way to move away from killing animals, to create perfumes and the things that the body likes, and so forth. But she always said that she made work for people in the rainforest and so forth, who created soaps and so forth. And that was appealing to people. And she had a wonderful sense of humor. But she was very generous with her success.

And at her funeral, which I was emcee of, in a very large church in London, right opposite the Westminster Abbey, it held 2000 people. And people from Africa and India, South America, came to praise her and to thank her for her help in creating small businesses and so forth, and visiting and just lots of beautiful stories. So I remember in my short -- because many people were testifying, and I just a few minutes to testify -- but I dared call her a saint, not in the pietistic sense, she was not a churchgoer as such, but because of the generosity, authenticity, and the joy, and the caring that she put out there, and her passion for justice and so forth.

So that's the question I want to leave you with: How many saints have you known, and what makes them saints? How are we redefining holiness in our time?

Thank you. See you in the meditations this week, and next week in the video. Bye, now.