

Contemplative Outreach

Spiritual Journey with Thomas Keating

Part 5 Tape 24(a)



The Most Excellent Path (1 Cor: 12.30)

Having completed an overview of the Christian life, we now look at the heart of the Christian tradition which is the mystery of Divine love. In chapter 12 of the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the charismatic gifts. In chapter 13, he observes that these gifts are worthless unless they are accompanied by **love**. He then goes on to describe love which he has introduced as the “more excellent way.” Our basic goodness human beings is a given. Our dignity is rooted in the image of the Divine within us, so, **only openness to love of the Divine can transform us.**

Trinitarian love is unconditional love. It is “agape”. It is not sentimentality. It is not just feeling. It is not possessive as human love is. It is the experience that Jesus had of his Father who is described in John’s gospel as love. God’s love is the secret of secrets and exploration of it is the **purpose of our Centering Prayer.**

The English word love is so diverse in meaning that it does not really catch it the meaning of “agape”. Such is the intensity of God’s love that he has to veil it from us and work through secondary causes. God’s love, therefore, is “**hidden**”, in this sense and also because it is so different to our love.

The eucharist is not just ritual but is the symbol of God’s “erotic” love – of our desire for God. The metaphor is that we love God so much we can “eat” God. God becomes utterly vulnerable in the eucharist. The food we eat enlivens us and is transformed into part of us. **The eucharist is the mystical peak of our communion with God and with each other.** We embrace God and God embraces us. We become cells of a mystical body and each cell, each “holon” of our DNA breathes of God.

The **kingdom of God is a state of consciousness** where we are transformed by the reality of God. This was Jesus’ message, his good news and his experience of the reality of creation and of human life in God and with God. Our relationship with “Abba” is an extremely intimate relationship. Abba guides us from within. The relationship is one of love, gift and friendship and through a life of prayer it grows to commitment.

When Jesus meets **the rich young man**, he tells him to sell all he has but the young man goes away sad (cf Lk: 18.18ff). Jesus then uses the exaggerated image of a camel going through the eye of a needle to illustrate how difficult it is to give up wealth, or any other baggage, for the sake of the kingdom. Sin is our **unwillingness to let go** of our emotional programmes for happiness, our group identification etc so that we can grow in love. Divine love may be totally gratuitous but it is also realistic so it goes after our selfishness and our investment in the ego.