Epiphany Reflection Three

“We encounter each other in words, words spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed, words to consider, reconsider.”

from Praise Song for the Day,
a poem by Elizabeth Alexander

This third reflection looks at how the written word can lead us into a deeper relationship with God. Literature is an avenue for expressing the human experience and discussing the matters of God and the soul. Through novels, poetry, non-fiction, and short stories, the substance of spirituality, religion and faith can be explored. The stories told in literature can help us evaluate our beliefs. By reading stories of birth, death, and the journey in between, we can use our imaginations to put ourselves in different situations and form new understandings about ourselves, our faith and our relationship to God.

The practice for this week will be using the prayer form of Lectio Divina with a piece of writing. Traditionally, Lectio Divina, or sacred reading, is used to pray with a portion of Scripture. In this exercise, the poem below may be used or something from a piece of literature you enjoy. Whether you use the poem, Praise Song for the Day, or you choose another, select only a small segment, just a few lines or a small paragraph to use for reflection. Set aside between 15 and 30 minutes. In this style of reading you are invited to read with the “eyes of your heart” not to collect information for the intellect, but to gather an awareness in your heart and soul.

The four steps in Lectio Divina are described below. Move gently into the practice, be patient with yourself. Come to the practice without presumptions. Instead, bring a sense of wonder. Do not reject this form of prayer if it feels like nothing is happening. It takes practice.

Epiphany Practice 3

Opening Reflection

Offer a prayer which brings you to the awareness of the presence of God. Offer your intentions for this time of prayer.

Read through Praise Song for the Day.

Praise Song for the Day

Each day we go about our business, walking past each other, catching each other’s eyes or not, about to speak or speaking.

---

1 This poem is by Elizabeth Alexander and was written for the inauguration of President Barak Obama. You may be interested to read an interview of Elizabeth Alexander by Faith & Leadership, an offering from Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School. http://www.faithandleadership.duke.edu/qa/elizabeth-alexander?page=0,1
All about us is noise. All about us is
noise and bramble, thorn and din, each
one of our ancestors on our tongues.

Someone is stitching up a hem, darning
a hole in a uniform, patching a tire,
repairing the things in need of repair.

Someone is trying to make music somewhere,
with a pair of wooden spoons on an oil drum,
with cello, boom box, harmonica, voice.

A woman and her son wait for the bus.
A farmer considers the changing sky.
A teacher says, Take out your pencils. Begin.

We encounter each other in words, words
spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed,
words to consider, reconsider.

We cross dirt roads and highways that mark
the will of some one and then others, who said
I need to see what’s on the other side.

I know there’s something better down the road.
We need to find a place where we are safe.
We walk into that which we cannot yet see.

Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,
picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
brick by brick the glittering edifices
they would then keep clean and work inside of.

Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.
Praise song for every hand-lettered sign,
the figuring-it-out at kitchen tables.

Some live by love thy neighbor as thyself,
others by first do no harm or take no more
than you need. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.
In today’s sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,

praise song for walking forward in that light.

*Reflection in the style of Lectio Divina*

Using a small portion of *Praise Song for the Day* or another writing of your choosing move through the following four steps.

**Reading**
Read through the piece of writing slowly several times. Watch for the word or phrase which catches your attention.

**Reflecting**
Spend some time with the word or phrase which you are attracted to.
Say the word or phrase aloud several times.
Using your imagination and intuition to examine each word.
How are you touched by these words? What would you like to bring to prayer?

**Praying**
With simplicity, bring your prayer to God.

**Contemplating**
Be in silence, letting go of the activities that have come before. Simply be in the presence of God.

Offer a closing prayer including any thanksgiving or intercessions you may have.

**Resources**

**Books**


*Best Spiritual Writing* series from Penguin Books. Each year, Philip Zaleski compiles the best spiritual writing from the year into a single volume.

*Listening for God*, Paula J. Carlson, Peter S. Hawkins, editors, Augsburg Fortress, 2003, In this collection of four books, the editors have collected contemporary American writers who tell stories of life’s struggle from the viewpoint of various religious traditions. The books contain guides to reflection.
Web Sites

explorefaith.org - Spiritual guidance for anyone seeking a path to God
http://www.explorefaith.org/prayer/meditation/index.php  This is a wonderful resource for growing spiritually. There are resources here for meditating with art, music, poetry and for cultivating a quiet mind.

Image Journal  http://imagejournal.org/page/journal/  From the web site -- “a unique forum for the best writing and artwork that is informed by—or grapples with—religious faith. We have never been interested in art that merely regurgitates dogma or falls back on easy answers or didacticism. Instead, our focus has been on writing and visual artwork that embody a spiritual struggle, that seek to strike a balance between tradition and a profound openness to the world.”