

Reflections on the Psycho-Spiritual Journey and the Self: In the Light of Christ

by
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We imagine that the greatest suffering is to lose our sense of “self”, our sense of separateness, uniqueness and individuality. Yet, in fact, it is just this sense of individuality that paradoxically leads us to feel isolated, lonely and abandoned. For most of us the truth is terrifying; we must die to that very same sense of self in order to identify with what is most human and most divine. It is this dying to the separated sense of self that leads to the fullness of life in God. It is this dying on the cross of isolated being that Jesus accepts and that leads to the experience that we call Resurrection because it brings about the birth of what it is to be fully human and alive in God. It leads us to the “Other”, to all others, and the real experience of our shared human condition, willingly embraced. Now my life is your life, our life, of pain, suffering and joy. We have learned how to love because we have been “loved into being”. The transformation is truly a metanoia, a complete change of direction, towards, rather than away, from life, humanity and all of creation.

This process of transformation is painful and subject to all kinds of self-

deceptions and mostly unconscious resistances. We don't want to give up this sense of self that was so hard to achieve while growing-up. How do human beings grow to this immense realization and new way of being? The goals of psychological development appear to lead us in the opposite direction. As infants we learn who we are from our parents and siblings, literally sensing our selves by how we are touched, held and gazed upon. Our challenge as young children is to learn to do many things by ourselves and gain a sense of personal mastery over our environment. Even infants learn to hold a bottle then a cup and soon learn to feed themselves. Young children learn to dress themselves, pick out stories to have read to them, games to play and learn how to negotiate how to share toys with others. All through our early years of life our goals are to become self-sufficient, self-assured, self-aware and capable of choosing what we want to do with our lives. We become individuals, separate from our parents and siblings, sometimes with great struggles to attain our right to be who we are, separate from everyone else! This does not sound like the

spiritual awakening described above.

Paradoxically it is this same process of solid self-identification and self confidence that lays the ground for spiritual growth. We cannot put ourselves aside and be truly and fully present to another person until we have built that strong sense of ourselves.

Otherwise our own needs to be approved of, cared for, recognized and valued get in the way of our acceptance of others as they are, and our availability, or ability to love others. We get caught up in what we want to achieve or what we desire and think we need to have to be “happy”. We long for relationships out of our need to be liked, loved, approved of and accepted by others and yet fear authentic relationship in that it would mean our having to give up what we think of as our “independence” and “freedom”. We have successfully identified ourselves with what Thomas Merton called the “false self”.

The false self is identified when we begin to recognize that we depend upon many outside influences to determine our own self worth. Success is determined by our income, our position and our “things”. Our self esteem plummets when we lose a job, fail to get an interview or feel criticized by others. Our achievements and number of educational degrees gives us a sense of superior intelligence and feeds our need to “know” be “right” and above all transcend our own

humanity. We build a fortress of defenses against our own vulnerability and the fragility of human life. Dependant feelings are experienced as “weakness” and strength is equated with self sufficiency, independence and separateness. This is surely not the kind of self confidence that lays the ground for spiritual growth because it is based on a false sense of security that is easily shaken when the illusions of these external pillars fail to support us, when we fail economically, physically or in our relationships with others.

How is this different from a solid sense of self-identification and self confidence? When our self esteem is based on self knowledge and authentic self acceptance we relate to ourselves and others differently. We know what we are good at and where we are limited. We enjoy our own sense of accomplishment and can accept the praise of others but do not need it to feel good about ourselves. We have no difficulty asking for help and admiring the skills of others. Our self esteem is not shaken by disappointments and set backs in life and we feel competent to overcome obstacles. We know that we are not “perfect” either in our appearance or abilities and don’t need to be. We are not crushed by criticisms of others nor do we overly criticize ourselves. We can admit our weaknesses and we may even sense the pull of a desire or longing for something meaningful and beyond

ourselves in life. This person is fertile soil for the spiritual journey. In fact, even the difficult process of discovering the “true self” as opposed to the “false self” is both a psychological and a spiritual journey, the two being so intertwined with one another that we can hardly speak of one without the other, even though many try to do so.

Only when we actually begin to notice that our achievements, our financial status, even our friends, spouses and children, no matter how warmly experienced, somehow still leave us with a vague sense of longing that we can hardly articulate, do we begin to acknowledge the mysteriously hidden aspects of our human experience that we call “the spiritual journey”. We are searching for something that doesn't seem to find its goal in our own self sufficiency, competence or achievements, or even in our relationships. We discover that our years of striving to reach our personal goals in both work and relationships were extremely important to our sense of identity and the feelings of accomplishment that fuel self esteem, yet somehow there is something “more”.

Once there was a young person who sought out a famous Spiritual Master as a guide. The Master asked the young person what he wanted. The seeker answered that he wanted to make a lot of money. The Master replied, then go and do that. Some years later

the seeker returned to the Master. I have made my fortune yet I am still not happy, the seeker told the Master. The Master asked, what do you want? I want to travel and see the world. Then go and do that, replied the Master. When the seeker returned having traveled all over the world, the Master asked, what do you want? I want a spouse and a family. Then go and do that, replied the Master. The seeker returned after some time and again the Master asked what the seeker wanted. I want a big house, an SUV and a sailboat. Then go and do that, said the Master. Once again the seeker returned saying, I have a wonderful family and all the things that my heart desires and yet I long for something more. Then you are ready to begin the spiritual journey replied the Master.

Although this story appears to make a distinction between the psychological and spiritual journeys, in fact it describes the process of human growth and development that attends to the desires of the human heart where the invitation to the psycho-spiritual journey takes place. Psychologically we must learn to listen to our own heart's desire and take it seriously even when we imagine erroneously that our happiness and sense of self depends on having many things and relationships. It is this process of listening to our own longings that leads us along the path towards spiritual awakening. Learning to

listen to my heart's desires and struggling to achieve them builds my self esteem and a strong sense of Self so that I can learn to accept my own limitations along with my strengths. I am becoming self aware and can articulate what I think and feel. There is an "I" that I identify as "me", as separate from others, even though I am like them in many ways.

The invitation to move towards my True Self and transformation is experienced as a vague stirring of dissatisfaction and a painful sense of longing. It is at this stage of the psycho-spiritual journey that I start to recognize that I am looking for something beyond myself or perhaps some hidden part of myself that I sense is there. The process of transformation is taking on a new dimension and I may seek out a spiritual guide. I find myself drawn to solitary places where I can listen to my own heart's longing with more attention. I am drawn to the spiritual writings of mystics and saints and I begin to hear the biblical readings in a more personal way. They are inviting me into a new relationship with God. The liturgical celebration leads me into the season of Advent in preparation for the birth of Christ and perhaps for the first time I find myself in the midst of the story.

When the angel of God appears to Mary and tells her not to be afraid and that she will bear a son named Jesus, the angel is

speaking to me. And like Mary I am afraid and wonder what this means and how it can come about. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you....nothing is impossible with God". It occurs to me that I am being asked to accept something outrageously unbelievable with the innocence and openness of a thirteen year old Mary. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word".(Luke 1:30-38) I am being invited to give birth to Christ in my own heart, to bring new life into being. In fact, something new is being born within me and it will change my life forever. This Self that I have come to know as "me" begins to question who I really am. Who is this Jesus who is coming to life in Mary's womb, in me? I have a glimmer of something even more enlightening. This child of God is being born anew within everyone. Everyone is invited to receive him. I barely begin to sense that I am not alone in this story of spiritual awakening.

I feel vulnerable in this new place of openness to God. I feel grateful for my life and all that I have and yet at the same time somehow unworthy and much more aware of how little I am, how fragile life is, how much in life is totally beyond my control. I suddenly realize that I need this child-God to give me my life, to become my life. My longing is turning into love for a little newborn

child, God being born into the world. The love that I feel for my family and friends is growing, expanding, changing. I begin to see every child that is born into this life as a child of God, of infinite possibility. But what does that mean, to be a child of God?

Children are dependant on their parents and families for nurturing, protection and love. In fact they are dependant for many years on receiving all their needs for shelter, food clothing and education. Yet as we have seen, the process of maturing into healthy and independant adults requires fostering independance and self sufficiency. Healthy interdependant relationships with family and friends means allowing my needs to be known by others and the willingness to meet the needs of others. Now I am being invited to a radical shift in my experience of myself, and ultimately of others as well. Giving birth to Christ in my own heart is giving birth to a new kind of love. Like a child I begin to experience how vulnerable I really am in life, that as much as I have accomplished and learned my deepest longing is to love, and to know in the depths of my soul that I am loved unconditionally, just because I exist. Only God can love like that and to give birth to Christ in my own heart and soul is to begin to experience the mysterious reality that this

God, who is Existence itself, has loved me into existence through a tiny and totally dependant infant, the son of Mary. I feel called to nurture this child Jesus within me so that God's love for human life can become my own.

After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist, he was led out into the desert for forty days where the Gospels say that he faced the temptations of Satan. In my new way of hearing these stories I am suddenly caught off guard. I am just beginning to sense God's love in my life when I find old patterns of behavior and doubts about this very experience pulling me in a different direction. Who am I, after all, to think that God is calling me, loving me and offering me new life? I begin to question the validity of this new experience of the divine. I am even tempted to forget all about it and return to my comfortable life with family and friends ignoring this pull towards something "more". I am struggling with the most damaging temptation of all, to distrust my own heart's desire, to deny my own experience.

When the devil led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the temple suggesting that if he were the Son of God he could throw himself down from there and be saved by the angels, Jesus replied that the scriptures say, "You shall not put the Lord

your God to the test”. (Luke 4:12).

This solid sense of self, of knowing who I am based on my experience of my own thoughts and feelings, and the assurance of trusting my own instincts that has served me so well through the years, is being put to the test. What do I really want? Even in my confusion, I sense that I can trust this Spirit of God who has thus far opened my heart to a new kind of knowing and seeing. No, I will not give in to this temptation to turn away from life itself. I am free to choose. I do not need to throw myself down from the parapet of the temple to prove that God truly loves me. I can choose to follow my heart’s desire and trust my own experience. It seems that there is something essential in the psycho-spiritual journey about having developed a strong sense of Self. How else would I be able to choose to listen to my own heart’s desire and resist the temptations to deny my own experience? And yet, there is something far more powerful in these stories of Christ’s responses to Satan’s temptations, for Jesus refuses the offers to save himself from hunger, or to in any way resort to the saving powers within him of the God he called, Abba, Father. Instead, he repeatedly answers Satan with the words of God revealed in the scriptures, remaining obedient to God and fully acknowledging the reality of his human condition. “Though he was in the

form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born of the likeness of men”.(Phil. 2:6-7)

What am I to make of this refusal of Jesus to claim his divine power in order to fully identify himself with us, with me? Is it a strong sense of self that I need to resist temptations? Perhaps it is an acknowledgment of my own real experience of being human rather than claiming or desiring powers I do not have. I am just beginning to sense my need to fully own the limitations inherent in being human and the wisdom in allowing God to be God. I am starting to recognize my dependence on this God/man who loves humanity enough to willingly experience our human frailty. My sense of self is being stretched, expanded and enlarged and will ultimately be transformed on this path towards God.

As Jesus begins his public ministry he gathers a group of ordinary workers, fishermen and laborers, fellow Jews from the villages along the coast calling on them to follow him, to see where he “lives”. I am following him too as I listen to the stories of God’s way of seeing and loving humanity. He heals, preaches conversion of heart, from self-centeredness to becoming centered in God. He speaks in parables that teach that loving God

means to love one another and that loving one another means to care for the least among us including the poor, the widowed, the orphaned and above all the stranger, even the “enemy”. Jesus’ teachings are counter-cultural. Every parable turns a common understanding of relationship to oneself and others into something radically new. “You have heard the commandment, You shall love your countrymen but hate your enemy. My command to you is: love your enemies and pray for your persecutors.... If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that?... In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. (Matthew 5:43-48)

What does it mean to be made perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? Surely Jesus is not referring to the form of perfectionism that plagues so many in our culture, trying to build one’s self-esteem on what we do rather than who we are, or worse to inflict unattainable standards on ourselves in our fear of not being good enough or as good as we imagine everyone else is. This is far from a healthy self-acceptance and true self awareness. It appears that Jesus is talking about the relationship that He has with God whose love is all encompassing and therefore merciful and compassionate towards all of God’s creation and towards our human place within it. To be perfect as God is perfect is to

love mercifully, compassionately and to recognize how powerful Love is as a force for growth, change and transformation of our human failings and weaknesses. God loves us just as we are and has come into our human life as a helpless infant to share in our experience that we may know what it is to be fully human, alive in God. I sense that God is inviting me to become perfectly who I am.

As I become more and more myself I have more and more capacity to accept others as they are as well. The more I feel loved by God, reassured that who I am is who God meant me to be, the more I feel capable of loving others as God loves them. I listen to the stories of how Jesus enters into human life with a deeper sense that I am being taught how to live my own life. There are miracle cures, and the ability to feed the multitudes with a few pieces of bread and fish and the raising of those thought to be blind or dead to new sight and new life. I am in awe of the power of this Son of Man from Nazareth, a carpenter by trade who speaks of the reign of God as a mustard seed, planted in a field as the smallest of all seeds, yet when it is full grown is so large that the birds make their nests in it. The reign of God is like a treasure buried in a field that is so valuable that it is worth selling everything to be able to acquire that field. It is in our midst, Jesus said, for us to finally recognize. When He cures my

blindness, awakens me from sleeping through life I do finally recognize Him. The reign of God is within me, and it is within everyone.

With this new sense of self I enter into the forty days of Lent, the forty days when Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert before entering into the ministry that led him to the Cross. I hear Jesus telling me that if I wish to come after him I must deny my very self, take up my cross and begin to follow in his footsteps. He said that if I try to save my life I will lose it but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it. He said, "What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?" (Matthew 18:24-26). For the next forty days I am walking with Jesus towards Calvary. By fasting from food I am aligning myself with those who have none. Fasting feels like a clearing of my vision, a sharpening of my understanding, and prayer is slowly becoming more nourishing than food itself. I hunger for these moments of solitude where I can reflect on what I am hearing.

The stories of Jesus calling the lowly fishermen to "come and see" where He lives in his heart, and preaching of God's unconditional love to the poor and disenfranchised, inviting them to a new experience of themselves, reminds me that He came to heal the sick and brokenhearted. How does that relate to me? In some ways I

have been "sick" in the ways that I have been unkind and judgmental, selfish and greedy and wanting things my own way. Most of all I feel powerless to change so many painful and violent conflicts in the world, unable to change the devastating effects of disease and suffering even in my own family. I have been truly brokenhearted for the victims of the devastating effects of earthquakes and hurricanes and disappointed that human beings have not learned to solve political and economic conflicts in any other way than through war and violence. I feel vulnerable, helpless, weak and powerless in the face of so much human suffering. Yet, I continue to feel pulled towards a feeling of hope that I might be healed from my tendencies to be self centered, or downright mean and irritable towards others, from my many past mistakes and shameful experiences. Even though these feelings of inadequacy seem to invade me when I try to pray, I continue to open my heart to this God who I now begin to experience as one who can forgive my human failings, who somehow wants me to feel forgiven and offers me the strength to try again. "When I am powerless it is then that I am strong", wrote Saint Paul. (2 Cor. 12:10)

Perhaps Paul's experience of conversion from persecuting Christians to being persecuted himself as a Christian is an invitation for me to experience my own

conversion of heart. Perhaps I need to address my own violent nature as a human being to know what can be done about violence in others. I start to experience my sense of self and personal identity as less important and my former world view as too narrow. The prophet Isaiah reminds me that something new is happening:

“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not;

See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers.

Wild beasts honor me, jackals and ostriches,

For I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland

for my chosen people to drink, The people who I formed for myself,

that they might announce my praise”.(Isaiah 43:18-21)

The way out of the dry, parched and empty desert of my separate and isolated self is like finding water in the desert to quench my thirst for something ‘more’ in life. This new path towards God flows like a river toward the open sea from the wasteland that was my narrow world view. In this journey through Lent I am challenged once again by Jesus with a powerful image of who He really is:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me”.... I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me”.(Matthew 25:35-40)

How can I pass by a homeless person in the street without caring, or not offer help to a stranger or visit those who find themselves abandoned in our nursing homes where we set them apart from active life so that we don’t see the loneliness of old age? I am beginning to understand that to see with the eyes of God is to see the face of God in each and every person everywhere with a loving and compassionate heart. When I reach out to another suffering human being I am doing God’s work in the world, offering God’s comfort and comforting God in the same kind gesture. I am suddenly struck by a new sense of self that recognizes myself in all those who hunger and thirst, suffer injustice or are forced to flee from violence as refugees. Every immigrant and foreigner who seems to be so different from me is a human being, a child of God as I am. I find myself moved to tears by the images of human suffering that are ever present in the news each day and I identify with the millions of men, women and children who are the real victims of the

choices for war and violence by their, and our political leaders. My heart is breaking for those who would inflict such pain on a fellow human being and I begin to cry for our broken world.

I enter into the week that we call Holy, into the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Our Lord, with a feeling of anxiety, an ominous sense that the shouting of Hosannas as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday in order to prepare for the Jewish Passover Feast the following Thursday, is not the end of this story. In one account we are told that Jesus washes the feet of his disciples saying that this is what they must do for one another. Like Peter in this account, I am taken aback by this gesture, by the humility of the one they called Lord performing the action of a servant. Could it be that there is something about God that Jesus is demonstrating in this gesture that I have not understood? My ability to think rationally, which is so much a part of my sense of self, is once again shaken. Like the disciples I have been following him, learning from him and have come to know him as my guide, a master teacher whose words speak to the core of my being and change how I think and perceive and experience myself and others. He is my Lord too. What does it mean that my Lord washes the feet of his disciples if not that God mysteriously serves me just as I feel compelled to serve Him. And

there is more, because I am asked to “wash the feet” of my friends, family, neighbors and even strangers. Am I still too proud? Too self-conscious to be a true servant of the needs of others?

The Gospels tell us that while the disciples gathered around Jesus as he was reclining at the table set for the Passover Feast he told them that one of them would betray him. As many times as I have heard this story and know that Jesus is speaking about Judas Iscariot, I shudder to think that I too am capable of betraying the one I love, of denying him like Peter does later on, out of fear for my own safety. How tenaciously we hold on to this fragile sense of self no matter what is at stake. I am struck by how much I am like these first disciples of Jesus who argue over who is the greatest and vow that their faith will never be shaken even to their death. Yet, he said to them, “Tonight your faith in me will be shaken, for Scripture has it. ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be dispersed.’ (Mark 14:27)

Despite his objections Peter is told that he will deny Jesus three times that very night. It seems that even when I think I know my self and how I will behave under stressful circumstances, the instinct to save my life can be greater than my love for Love itself. When Jesus broke bread, blessing it in thanksgiving to God and gave it to the disciples he said,

“This is my body to be given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” and then after blessing a cup of wine from which they all drank he said, ”This covenant is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you”.(Luke 22:19-20) As often as I have heard these words ritualized in the celebration of Communion at every Mass, only now do I start to reflect on what Jesus is actually saying. There is a great mystery here that stretches my reasoning self, that goes beyond my logical mind and ability to understand. I am being called to have faith in the transforming effects of a morsel of bread and a sip of wine. Even his own disciples didn’t understand what he was doing at that Passover meal. It was only later....

The Gospels tell us that after the Passover meal Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives to pray accompanied by his disciples. He asked them to pray that they not be put to the test and asked that they stay awake with him because his heart was breaking. Moving a little further on he fell to his knees praying, ”Father, if it is your will take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.....In his anguish he prayed with all the greater intensity, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. Then he rose from prayer and came to his disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted with grief. He said to them, Why

are you sleeping? Wake up and pray....”.
(Luke 22:39-46)

Reflecting on this scene in the scriptures I can only imagine the emotional agony that would cause a person’s sweat to become like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus begs God to save him from his destiny to suffer cruel torture and ultimately death. Even his disciples cannot stay awake with him in his agonizing prayer. Would I also abandon him, my friends and loved ones in their sufferings of cancer and other painful diseases that afflict we frail human beings? Can I say, ”Not my will but Yours be done ” and mean it with my whole heart when those I love are in pain? And even more clearly, can I say “Not my will but Yours be done” when I myself am suffering and in pain, and mean it? Can I give up my will, even my life if necessary and submit my very self to the mysterious, incomprehensible will of this God and father of Jesus who I have learned to trust with the very meaning of my life? Have I too, like the disciples of Jesus have not understood what my “Yes” to God would mean?

They came and arrested him while the disciples fled in fear. Only Peter followed them but even he denied his Lord three times that night just as Jesus had foretold. The Gospels say that Jesus was taunted and scourged, dragged from one authority to

another through the night and finally brought before the crowds who condemned him, shouting crucify him. It was a sentence given to criminals and murderers, a torturously slow death, nailed to a cross.

Some of the women including his Mother in one account, stood near as this son of Mary uttered his last words. "Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing". (Luke 23:34) "My God, my God why have you forsaken me"? (Matt. 27:46) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit". (Luke 23:46)

It is called Good Friday, this day that our Lord was crucified. It is a day of mourning and waiting and praying while he is placed in a tomb and I follow him there. Everything that I thought gave meaning and purpose to my life until now seems hollow, empty and unimportant faced with this feeling of loss. Something in me is dying too as I enter this void and vast nothingness that is the tomb. I have experienced loss of loved ones before and recognize this shift in perspective. Death, and its accompanying sense of loss, overshadows the importance of all that has been the fabric and meaning of my life thus far. My accomplishments as dancer, writer, teacher, therapist and roles in life as daughter, wife, mother and friend fade in importance for awhile as some part of me dies with this loved one. Yet this death of Jesus on

a cross defies all reason. Jesus said, "I solemnly assure you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit". (John 12:24) What kind of love is this that is represented by death on a cross? How can such a scandalous death be the fruit of new life and love?

Dare I take the risk of letting go of all that I have identified with as my life, my self, and trust that God is truly doing something new? Follow him, my heart tells me, die with him and enter the void, empty space of becoming nothing, no-thing. This is the very meaning of faith, to trust what reason can not imagine, to risk walking into the unknown, to risk discovering who I really am, to discover my true self. "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps. Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it". (Luke 9:23-24)

In one account we are told that Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb on Sunday with burial spices and perfumes but found the tomb where Jesus had been placed open and empty. She ran back to tell the other disciples who followed her back to the place to see for themselves. Then Mary Magdalene had the first experience of the risen Christ. Others on the road to the village of Emmaus were

discussing all that had happened when Jesus joined them but they did not recognize him. When they told him how their hopes that Jesus would set Israel free were disappointed when he was crucified and that the women had reported seeing him alive at the tomb he began to interpret the scriptures for them. They invited him to stay with them for supper and only when he blessed and broke the bread did they finally recognize him. At that moment he disappeared. In many stories Christ appears to the disciples and when he does finally leave them he promises that the power of the Holy Spirit will be given to them.

Whatever this experience of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection was for these first witnesses it is clear that it was so powerful that it transformed their lives. They were moved by this Spirit of God to preach to all who would listen and travelled far and wide to do so even in the face of persecution. This understanding that Christ had sacrificed his life out of love for them, for us and for all of humanity is a profound message about what I am called to be on this spiritual journey towards God. It is my invitation to transformation from a false self to a true self. Truly loving others, all others, as Christ loves them requires a sacrifice of my self for the sake of others. This kind of love sees in every human being the face of Christ and even

allows me to love those who would harm me. I can pray for those who persecute me because I recognize the common face of suffering humanity in both of us.

I know the experience of a disease that caused me so much unrelenting pain that I screamed out loud for days and weeks and in the midst of it suddenly knew that Christ was suffering too. Not just with me, but in me. And it was from that time on that I could identify my new self with the words of Saint Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me". (Galatians 2:20) Now I can truly accept my own humanity and see my self with the loving eyes of a compassionate God and in doing so can accept all other human beings as my own brothers and sisters.

"There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or free man, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus". (Gal. 3:27-28)

With the disciples on the road to Emmaus I too can recognize God in the breaking of the bread and enter into this sacrifice of the Mass in Communion with others. And I can also recognize God in all the meals I share with others and pray every day that those without enough to eat will be fed as I promise to do all I can to ensure that they are.

The psycho-spiritual journey lived in the light of Christ is ultimately the Mystery

of the Birth, Life, Crucifixion and
Resurrection of Christ as it is lived out in my
life over and over again ever more deeply
every year in this journey of life towards
God. I must indeed die to my sense of “self”,
of separateness, uniqueness and individuality
in order to bring about the birth of what it is
to be fully human and alive in God.