

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

INNER VIEWS

Our approach to our Catholic faith isn't like it used to be. From a point of view that values tradition for tradition's sake this is troubling. But as I work with faithful people who are struggling to live their faith in a complex world, I find this to be hopeful.

I would like to contrast the attitudes that have evolved in the last 400 years with the emerging sensitivities that we are learning in dealing with our present world. Hopefully this will clarify some of your experiences.

The attitudes and perspective of our past will be in a regular font while the emerging perspective will be in *italic*.

We grew up with a spirituality that is measured in terms of laws kept, mortifications, virtues and devotions practiced, prayers said and Masses attended. Quantity trumped quality. The human person was described as a "rational animal". Using our mind and will we considered the way to act humanly as opposed to following our "animal" nature. We needed to know what was "right" and use our will to force us to act in accordance. This way of life had the advantage of being clearly defined. But it is also overly literal and simplistic.

The emerging image of a spiritual person attempts to integrate all of the facets of our personality: mind, will, intuition, instincts, emotions, spirit, shadow and relationships. This emphasizes the human as a free but wounded person. Instead of judging our self in terms of standards reached it sees development as an ongoing quality of the spiritual life. We become spiritual through maturing in the quality of our personal and affective development as we learn to relate to God and on another.

The traditional approach offered simple, clearly defined activities which could be measure by the number of repetitions. We memorized the catechism abstained from meat on Fridays, gained indulgences, and completed devotions. Revelation was a series of statements to be affirmed about God and the human condition. The emphasis was on external compliance. What we did was more important they why we did it.

The emerging awareness focuses on growth in our relationship with God as a Source of our relationships with one another. We are aware that we are unique in the way this plays out in our life and that our life circumstances plays a major role in our formation. Revelation points to our awakening to God's intimate presence as the Source of our self and the possibility of who we can be. Jesus is the divine/human Son of God whose life, death and resurrection is the meaning of who we are meant to be as the human/divine children of our Father. We grow in our relationship with Jesus rather than assenting to propositions about him.

In the traditional perspective life is seen as a struggle for perfection. Imperfections are meant to be weeded out and virtues practiced. The ideal was clear, even though it was impossible: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Our lives were evaluated in terms of our failures to reach the ideal and the degree to which we failed these goals. We feared God because we couldn't measure up to him. But we hoped to gain God's mercy by trying harder. Heaven was the reward for our success.

The emerging vision recognizes the love of God as an abiding source of support and inspiration. We meet God right here, where we are, loving us as we are. Our spiritual lives are an intimate relationship with God that grows in depth, not a project to be accomplished. Creative humbleness and gratitude in the midst of every changing challenges and opportunities replace holding our nose to the grindstone. (More next week).

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Last week I pointed out some of the differences between a traditional understanding of faith in contrast to the emerging understanding. The traditional understanding is “traditional” in the sense that it was the commonly shared understanding for the last 400 years. Most people took this to be the Catholic belief. Actually it was the way the majority of Catholics understood their faith and the way today’s media characterizes Catholicism. But it has never been the only way. There have always been theologians and spiritual writers who consider this approach as too literal and to black and white to do justice to the richness, complexity and diversity of our tradition.

The Council of Trent (1545-47) set a standardized education for priests so that they would be able to understand the basic meaning of our tradition. Education, however, is not enough. A further step is needed and was provided for in retreats and spiritual direction. That step is to connect to the inner reality, the experienced meaning of our traditions. But when you realize that 75% of Westerners are extroverts you can see that they are not naturally inclined to inner reflection. To this day there is a tendency among some to focus on role and ritual rather than the deeper, inner meaning of our faith. Yet there also seems to be a spiritual urge drawing more and more people to integrating their spiritual depths.

This interior urge can be seen in the way we understand the Church in today’s world. The “traditional” understanding saw the Church primarily as an institution from which grace flows from the top through the hierarchical structures to the individual. In this understanding God speaks through superiors and religious leaders.

The emerging understanding sees the Church as primarily a community of believers called together in faith. This is actually reminiscent of the earliest self understanding of Jesus’ followers. We certainly need a visible structure and qualified leaders but this does not cancel out the reality of god in our midst, working through all of our lives. The Spirit speaks through us all. We grow in our faith by worshipping together. We are one body. We are branches on the same Vine.

This difference is seen most clearly at Mass. We grew up attending Mass as a private devotion. We attended at the same time but as separate individuals. The grace of the sacrament was considered a commodity, something external to us that could be stored up.

The emerging spirituality experiences the Mass as the coming together of God’s people, our Father gathering his children around the family table. We are here to share the scriptures and share in the sacred meal. It is much more than a private audience with Jesus that prepares us to receive communion. We come to know Jesus in the community who are transubstantiated as well as the bread and wine. We meet Jesus in receiving the sacred body and blood as well as in receive each other. Through all of this we become the Church, the living body and blood of Christ on earth.

A final difference, and I believe this is having a profound impact, is the difference between our ego and our spiritual self. Actually this has been the underlying theme of these **INNER VIEWS**. Our ego is the way we normally function. When our ego is in charge we have sincere people whose actions are filled with contradictions. This is because our ego focuses on ideas about who we are and who we should be rather than the actual reality in which we are involved. Although our ego is a necessary part of our lives it can only mimic spiritual realities. This is the limitation of the “traditional” approach. *But we need to loosen the hold of our ego if we want to experience God’s intimacy and let God be the Source of our living.*

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Our Life is An Act of God's Love

As spiritual beings we emerge from the heart of God. We do not cause this emergence, but we can participate in it through awareness. Since God's love is unconditional we learn to resonate with it by developing unconditional awareness of our self and our experience. Here are some short prayers that express the reality of who we are because of who God is.

You can begin by taking a few deep breaths and reminding yourself that the God who loves us unconditionally is not the goal of our prayer and meditation, but the Source. Every moment of our lives, every bit of our experience is immersed in unconditional loving Presence. As you slowly repeat these prayers allow them to express your own reality. You may want to pray some of them two or three times.

I am a spiritual being...
 At this moment I am loved unconditionally for all of who I am...
 I exist at this moment because I am being loved into existence...
 I am an act of God's love...
 I emerge from the heart of God as an expression of love...
 As an act of God's love I am enjoying...
 As an act of God's love I am loving...
 As an act of God's love I hunger for...
 As an act of God's love I want to...
 As an act of God's love I desire because I am desired.
 As an act of God's love I am the one who is here and now, alive in this moment...
 As an act of God's love I am feeling at this moment...
 As an act of God's love I am reading these words, seeing through these eyes...
 As an act of God's love I am because you love me Lord...
 As an act of your love I am free to love...
 As an act of your love I am...

Integrating this prayerful meditation:

Whatever you are experiencing at this moment is a mixture of your unique personality, your history and your choices in which God is present, loving you for all of who you are. Asking God to help you be present to this moment with love will help you resonate to God's presence.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS

Are You Ready?

There comes a time when we simply need more: something has awakened within us. A time comes when all that has fed our spirit no longer nourishes us, it has become junk food. The cultural faith in which we have grown up begins to collapse under the weight of our growing need. It is no longer enough, something has awakened within us. It may be unfamiliar but

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

somehow seems more faithfully ours. It has awakened our spiritual appetite in a way that nothing else has. We experience the reality of our self that is us beyond the clutter of our personalities and the chatter of our thoughts.

This may happen when our life falls apart. We lose our job or simply can no longer put up with it. Our relationships break apart revealing a knot within our heart that has separated us rather than connect us. Our body betrays us and our health abandons us. We grieve a loss and find that our grief has its own life. It comes and goes as it pleases. Or we may simply be captured by a yearning that will not be satisfied. Any one of these experiences can evaporate the illusion of control that supports our ego. And this exposes a deeper, more essential level of our self.

This loosening of the control of our ego may be a new experience or it may be vaguely familiar. In either case our spirit is embracing us.

What matters is that whatever we have accumulated in our life is no longer enough. The ways we've learned to cope no longer work for us. We want something more. Not more of what we have; not more thoughts, explanations and information; not more prayers; not more spiritual nosegays; not more meditation time; not more of anything we have had. We are experiencing a desire that is a reflection of God's desire for us and it is an infinite as God.

Until now the grass has always looked greener somewhere else and that has helped us put up with what we have. It gave us a hope that put off our deep yearning in lieu of future possibilities. Of course the future exists only as a receding horizon. Once we've searched out that greener grass long enough to know its an illusion we lose our hope that there is somewhere else to look. But here, where we're at, is not enough. We have been awakened by the here and now insistence of a yearning to be loved completely and unconditionally and to be loving beyond the boundaries of our fearful defenses. This may not be a new desire, but for some reason it has now become a necessity.

What we do know is that where we are coming from and where we are is not where we want to be. This is the only certainty left to guide us. It is the yearning of our soul, of that part of us made from Love and made to be loving. The very essence of our spirit is made for God. This seed has been sown in us from the beginning and now, after all these years of growing in the dark, it is sprouting into the light. Our choice is whether or not we want to nurture this growth and live in the light.

The gospel story of the Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-27) lays this choice out for us. A young man approaches Jesus and asks him, "Good teacher, what more must I do." Jesus' reply gives him the first clue: "Why do you call me good, no one is good but God." Our life is about God. The goal of our faith is God and God alone. Unfortunately we've been taught to work at saving ourselves rather than learning to love God.

Jesus goes on, "You know the commandments, keep them." The young man replies "I have kept all of them, what more must I do." In his mind its still about him.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

The gospel tells us that Jesus looked upon the young man with love. Jesus recognizes the gift of God's grace straining to awaken the young man. But the young man is blind to this. He is wrapped up in making himself worthy of God. For the young man it is about what he has done and what more he should do.

But for Jesus it's about what God is doing and the present possibility of waking up to this reality. Jesus gives the young man an impossible command, "God sell all that you have and give it to the poor."

If the young man takes this literally, as another command that he must perform to prove himself, there is just going to be one more homeless person in the world. But if he recognizes that he can't do this- that he must turn to God for help- he will awaken to a new way of relating to God. The gospel tells us that he hung his head and went away, for he had many possessions. Or more truly, he was possessed by many things.

But Jesus leaves us with the hope: "Nothing is impossible with God." There will be another possibility for the young man - when he is ready. That possibility might be ours right now. If you have read this far it probably is your possibility. Are you ready to let go of your limited world of facts, definitions, information and dogmas to live in the mystery of God?

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

"For God all things are possible."

"For God all things are possible," is the punch line to the gospel of the Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-27). The young man wanted Jesus to tell him what to do so that he could understand completely and perform perfectly. There is a consistent human temptation to try to tame God, to limit God to our understanding. Jesus is trying to tell the young man: its not about what we can do for God, its about what we allow God to do with us. That's hard to believe when you're young and full of energy to make you place in life.

When we approach God only with our mind, our ego, and our fear driven need to be in control (they are all the same thing in different disguises) we actually separate our self from God. We become bound to our thoughts and ideas which by their nature frame everything in terms of either/or, good/bad, with me/against me, and true/false. Our thoughts about God are not God. God is a living and loving, a God who can be known most fully in a loving relationship. Notice that Jesus does not define God but constantly tries to get us to relate to God as he does by describing God in metaphors.

We, as a culture, are emerging out of five hundred years of developing our mind and ego. This was a good and necessary step in our development and the evolution of our culture. It has given us our medical knowledge, our legal system, and the conveniences of our modern society. But it is a limited and limiting way of approaching God.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

When I was taught to memorize the Baltimore catechism in grade school one of the first questions we learned to answer was "Where is God?" and the answer was "God is everywhere." But then "everywhere" was taken away from God and we were taught that God was actually relegated to Catholics and even more precisely to our churches. You go to church to meet God. And in church God is in the tabernacle, and then only if the priest said a valid Mass, which was available only to "good" people who were without serious sin. This is the conundrum our mind creates because it uses either/or categories to define our beliefs. Our mind wants precision and clarity. But God does not fit those boundaries.

The first time I heard Jesus tell the Samaritan woman at the well, "Believe me woman the times is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem... God is spirit and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:11-14), I was confused. And then I wondered why Jesus let himself be baptized in a river and not in church, by a preacher and not the temple priest. He didn't seem to confine himself to the boundaries that were set up. It didn't make sense to me and I knew I had to find out why.

Here is Richard Rohr's insight into the way our thinking limits God and our experience of God.

"The individual Christian is told to love unconditionally, but the God who commands this is depicted as having a very conditional and quite exclusive love himself or herself! The believer is told to love his enemies, but "God" clearly does not: in fact, God punishes them for all eternity. This stifles and paralyzes many believes at the conscious or unconscious level, and it should. Such a message will not save the world and surely will not produce many great or loving people. The many loving Christians I have met in my life usually have had at least one unconditionally loving parent or friend along the way, and God was then able to second the motion."

Our ability to receive love and give love comes from experiences of being loved. Religious doctrines are an attempt to put the most important experiences into words and reflect upon them. In this way they are meant to point the way to expand our awareness so that we can share in these experiences.

Jesus was not a philosopher, a self help guru, or a life coach. He experienced the intimate love of our Father and he passionately shared in that love. Everything he said and did was an expression of this love and an attempt to awaken us to the experience for ourselves. "I have made known to you everything I have from the Father" (John 15:18).

The problem is not in the attempt to define and describe our beliefs about divine mysteries. The problem lies in our very human tendency to use these definitions and descriptions literally, rigidly and bombastically. We use them literally when we think they can adequately describe the mystery that can only be known through love. But when we accept them as metaphors that point the way these doctrines and dogmas can be very helpful. They help us relate to the mystery of God without being mystified. They can help us to be spiritual with a breadth of vision that arises out of a community of seekers and believers.

We use these beliefs rigidly when we become defensive, when we attach our self to one belief to the exclusion seemingly opposite beliefs, so that we can prove our point, and judge each other.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

This creates barriers that separate us from God, from one another and from the meaning of these beliefs. We know we have moved into this rigid space when we feel defensive, need to prove our point and prove our opponent to be "wrong." We can know this only when we have learned to reflect upon our inner experience. Until then we will be on the attack and convinced that it is the Catholic thing to do, in the name of Love.

This is how we took the "everywhere" out of God. When we as a church got defensive, protecting our self from "them," the Protestants and non-believers, we relegated God to our control. This was a response to a historical situation. But now as we become aware of it we have a chance to release God and relate to God on God's terms.

Our beliefs serve our faith when they open us up to the mystery of God and of God's creation.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Still point

INNER VIEWS Being Ready

Faith is not about using our beliefs to grasp God. Faith is about learning to let God grasp us. Our beliefs serve faith when they point to a more inclusive understanding of our experience. Our beliefs do us a disservice when they limit our understanding to the either/or, good/bad, Catholic/non-catholic, categories of our ego-mind. This gives rise to simplistic judgments like "Cafeteria Catholics," "New Age," "anti-Catholic," and a hundred more.

And then there's the opposite judgment, "I'm spiritual, not religious," which is often a reaction to the narrow limitations that labels create. Too many sincere believers with great spiritual intuition are put off by an attitude that denies the necessary freedom to explore and question that faith needs to mature. They are not willing to deny their experience, repress their awareness or pretend in order to fit in. They are the "Blessed pure of heart" who will see God. (Mt. 5).

We modern people have been brought up in a limited circle of understanding. We believe in facts and a material world, one that we can see and touch. Our attention is turned outward, which splits us from the inner life and God's presence. Too many of our beliefs are reduced to jargon because they are not connected to a deep inner experience of God's presence. This is the literal approach to faith in which we all begin. It just isn't the whole thing. It's a necessary beginning but it must point to the great breadth and depth of our relationship with the Trinity.

The grace, the gift, is that the depth of our faith and the treasury of our traditions can lead us to the transformation of seeing that gives rise to maturing in relationship to Trinity. The first step is to realize that other people, who have the same integrity, sincerity and good intentions as ourselves, see, experience and understand life far differently that we do. We don't all see the same way. We all see through our point of view, which is exactly that, one point. It's like driving through the mountains and coming to one of those scenic overlooks. It's easy to think we've seen

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

the whole thing when there is so much more. This is why we need a community of faith. We need people who have scouted further along the path and can urge us onward.

Once we've had time to realize that there are other points of view we can soften up our opinionated version of vision and begin to understand that we do not see things as they are. We see them through the lens of our personality, our ego-mind. Our worldview is how we've been able to make sense out of our life. But it is one point of view. Faith is more about opening up the way we see than it is about memorizing beliefs, doctrines and dogmas. These are meant to take us out of viewpoint and lead us into God's. This happens in relationship to God and through participation in God's community. When Jesus tells us that we have "eyes but do not see" he is trying to awaken us to a new way of seeing.

Learning how to see, taking on a new perspective, is what Jesus means by the word "repent." The new perspective is that of God's unconditional love. Unless you "get" this you will always revert to the narrowness and blindness of your dualistic mind, which sees in terms of either/or, black/white, good/bad, loveable/unworthy and so on. This might work as a basis of ethics, but it will not work for a Christ centered morality. Notice how many of Jesus' sayings are enigmatic, they demand a new vision on our part. They don't make sense to our ego: "You have to give up your life to save your life;" "Turn the other cheek;" "Blessed are the poor in spirit." These do not make logical sense, sense to our ego-mind. To quote one spiritual writer: "the culture and cultural religion have relied on the ego and not faith to be able to "see".

I say this to point out the vast horizon of vision into which God invites us. We feed into our ego-mind if we use it as another way to judge ourselves. It is simply something to notice in ourselves and help us trust ourselves into God's hands. God will help us mature in our relationship as we are ready. God loves us as we are. This is the hope of our future and that is the basis of our faith.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Still point

INNER VIEWS

Putting it back together.

Our inherited spirituality is about answers, facts, information and dogmas. But the path of maturing takes us into mystery, into the reality beyond the obvious. It leads us to the God that only love can know. Faith is not about grasping God with our minds but about allowing God to grasp us and teach us to trust by letting go of possessing: "...none of you can be my disciples if you do not renounce all of your possessions." (Luke 14:33).

If you read this whole passage you will immediately see that Jesus frames this "letting go of all your possessions," in terms of common sense. He tells us, "Don't do anything that you can't finish." And then he tells us to let go of everything. When Jesus gives us confusing and impossible directions he is bringing us to an edge where we can learn to trust God who will teach us what is possible. When Jesus leads us into the mystery it is not about using our mind and will to impose something new on our self. He is not demanding new ideas, he is helping us relate more intimately to our Father. It is about learning to let God, who loves us unconditionally, help us let go of the conditions we place on our self and on God.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Our faith is about learning to relate to God. The beliefs that put this faith into words are secondary and inadequate. They can point the way but as Jesus told us "I am the way." Faith is about a relationship that is aware of God as the absolute reality and center of our life. There can be no substitute for God.

We come to know God not by pushing our mind to make finer distinctions but by accepting the ultimate limitations of our mind. We come to understand that our journey is to a place where only love can go. Our ability and willingness to love will awaken us to the reality of God. This awakening has already happened on an intuitive level. Our beliefs and the theologies that try to explain these beliefs serve faith by challenging our faith to expand itself by including more and more of our experience of our self and our living within the framework of the Gospel story of Jesus.

Fundamentalism is basically a love affair with words and ideas about God instead of God. But you cannot really love words; you can only think them, impose them, and defend them. This is why fundamentalism so easily becomes rigid, defensive, aggressive and judgmental. With the best of intentions its thoughts and ideas about God create separation from God and replace a relationship to God with ideas about God.

By its very nature our mind is intent on judging, controlling and analyzing instead of seeing, hearing deeply, tasting fully, embracing and loving. Some form of loving must proceed true knowing. Our spiritual life begins when we realize that we will find only what we look for. If we look for information and answers we will get ideas. If we want to love God we will get mystery and relationship.

You can know only that which you first love - because otherwise you distort and divide your sight and eliminate any bothersome or threatening information. Then you do not love God but only your idea of God. We see what we are ready to see, expect to see, and desire to see.

This is why the spiritual path, even though it is basically simple, seems so complex and difficult. Learning to see past our ideas and judgments takes a lifetime of work and honest self-observation. We must let go of our judgments, get beyond the limits of our ideas and love the person for who they truly are. If you are in a committed relationship you know what this means. That is why commitment is so essential to the spiritual path.

The spiritual path is full of seeming contradictions. This is why the labyrinth with its twists and turns is often used as a symbol of walking the spiritual path. The first step in letting go of our literal approach to reality which is attached to words and ideas, is basically using words and ideas to understand the inadequacy of words and ideas. We begin to see that these words and ideas are not literal descriptions of reality, that what we think is not a mirror of what is actually there, but a metaphor through which we are interpreting reality.

This becomes obvious when you read the Bible's two differing description of creation (Genesis 1 & 2). It is not meant to be a history of facts about what "actually" happened at the beginning. Rather it gives us images which help us awaken to the meaning of creation. Creation comes from

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

a Creator who loves creation, who sees "it is good." The "big bang" could very easily have been the beginning, but it not the meaning. The meaning is that we are loved into being. The creation of the universe is the personal desire of a loving Creator, and so are we.

When you read scripture, especially the Gospels, you might ask yourself "How can I understand this as a bringing together of opposites into a whole?" We have been taught to label one side as good or moral and the other as bad. We turn this into opponents competing with each other. But if you can get past that simplistic distinction you'll see that Jesus most often includes both sides as necessary compliments to each other. Try reading Luke 15:1-10 in which the "righteous" grumble that Jesus is eating with "sinners." Jesus' solution is to invite both his sinner friends and the righteous to come together for a banquet. God loves wholeness. This could be because God is Creator and isn't willing to lose any of creation.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Still point

INNER VIEWS - Judge not...

If we want to grow, develop and mature as human beings we need to develop an ability to be present to our self with courageous honesty but without negative judgments. If we want to relate to other humans in a way that follows Jesus' command to love God and one another we must learn to love unconditionally without negative judgments. If we simply want a happier, more peaceful and fulfilled life, we need to live the meaning of our basic human nature which is created by Love to be loving. All of these have this in common: they are nourished and nurtured by a non-judgmental presence to our self that mirrors God's intimate Presence as our Source. Here is Jesus' advice for finding our way to God.

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you...For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." Luke 6: 36-38

Jesus sees and experiences life from a foundation of love that lets go of negative judgments in favor of unconditional presence and Presence (God's intimate presence as the Source of our presence). This is not an intellectual insight nor is it an act of will. It is a different way of seeing and perceiving reality that he has learned from the intimacy of his relationship with the Father. It is a way of being present from our deepest self, our inner essence that is created as an expression of God's love.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

To be unconditionally present we must be taught by God to perceive our self in the context of God's unconditional love. Our limited awareness can only see parts of our reality and believes that we are separate from the whole, from our foundation in unconditional Love. Jesus' consciousness remembers in both senses: he recalls our original unity and reunites our disjointed members. In this scripture passage he is advising us to avoid dismembering ourselves any further.

I see this dismembering play itself out over and over again in the arguments and fights we get into over religion and politics. In my life people have told me "You can't believe that;" "You can't ask that question;" "You must have lost your faith because you don't believe what I believe!" And I wonder, "How can they be so sure that what they believe is all that there is to believe?"

Actually I do more than wonder, I get angry. And the thought that goes through my mind is "Who are you to impose your ignorance on me? You are clearly unaware of church history and the breadth of Catholic theology. So why are you so certain that I am wrong? Why do you feel you have the right to impose your opinions on me?" And I can tell you from experience that this approach just gets me more riled up. At the same time I know from experience that if I can get beyond my defensiveness there is some reality behind their perceptions that I need to hear.

I have also been blessed with meeting many believers who are following their own path of courageous inquiry. Instead of imposing quick (we used to call them "rash") judgments they are sincerely open to following the reality of their experiences. They are looking to integrate their experience as well as their whole self into their beliefs. I've found that there is so much to learn from an ongoing conversation. And it such a relief to not be judged as being "anti-Catholic; cafeteria Catholic, losing my faith or disobeying the Pope." Somehow acknowledging our questions connects us to a necessary reality that feels more alive - even when it threatens the way we are living. In allowing ourselves to be vulnerable to the mystery of the unknown we connect to the sacred that cannot be counted among our knowns. This is a vulnerability we must endure and allow ourselves if we want to be faithful and faith filled, if we are willing to let God grasp us.

I believe that part of our role as a church is to create opportunities for conversations that open up the possibilities of learning and being stretched by each other's perspective. It has taken me a long, long time to not impose my own condemnations in retaliation to people who try to shut down my seeking. Actually it's taken longer than I have lived so far. I still act negatively far more often than I'd like. And this leaves me with the questions: "What is it that drives us apart" and "is there anything we can do about it?" Jesus tells us that "judge not, forgive and be generous" are where we begin.

First of all I believe that it is essential to find other people who are willing to explore beyond their prejudices. We all need the support of believers who are committed to the God of Jesus more than they are to their temporary way of defining and imagining God. At the same time I want to let this scripture passage lead me into Jesus' unconditional consciousness instead of using the conditions of my consciousness to judge other people. This means that once again I

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

have to let Jesus awaken me and convert me. It means trying to connect to my experience and letting Jesus broaden the horizons of my perspective.

Maturing in faith always reveals greater depth, clearer insight, more precise and universal truth, enhanced clarity, and humble radiance. In other words, maturing in faith always leads to a greater and more complete experience God's loving essence working within us.

Now that I've paid attention to what is going on within me I feel a tremendous relief. I've been wrestling with Jesus' advise to "judge not" for the last two weeks. Intuitively I feel that there's more to what Jesus is saying than immediately comes to my mind. The breakthrough comes from paying attention to all that is going on in me - without negative judgments. Now that I can let go of my inner struggle to defend some experiences and reject others I feel a freshness, like I've connected to something much more real, more true of who I am, than anything I've previously been aware of in myself. And I am going to spend time with this sense of peace and harmony because I'm sure it is part of the wholeness that Jesus experiences in his relationship to the Father.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS - Judge Not - Part II

"Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you... For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." Luke 6: 36-38

Jesus is trying to awaken us to his consciousness of living in the intimacy of God's unconditional love. In his consciousness judgments, forgiveness and generosity are interwoven threads of one cloth.

Our personal experience might give us some insight into what Jesus is trying to awaken within us. When we begin to move beyond the literal awareness of our self into our inner world we have moments of insight, of connection between our external actions and the memories we use to make sense of them. For example, we might suddenly realize that the reason one of our co-workers gets on our nerves is because they remind us of a relative who irritated us as a child.

This insight and the connection we made gives our action a sense of meaning. The meaning comes from connecting our outer reaction to our inner perception and this is accompanied by a feeling of freshness, of energy being released. We feel better because we are experiencing a bit of the wholeness of our person. We feel the truth of our wholeness which is God's presence as our shared Source with all creation.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Even at those times when we connect to painful qualities we'd rather reject a feeling of harmony accompanies our connection. This harmony comes from connecting to the wholeness of our self while the pain comes from our fragmentation caused by judgments about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in our personality. If we judge our self in a negative way we continue the fragmentation we continue to deny our reality. And this will leave us with a feeling of foreboding - we know something is there rattling around in the dark corners of our awareness.

If we judge our self with a neutral, accepting awareness we come into contact with God's love bringing us to wholeness - with the true nature of our inner self. In approaching our self with neutral judgments we are awakening to the essential unity of our being, a unity in which all experiences are moments of the basic harmony of lives founded in the same Source. "Judge not" Jesus tells us, learn to be fully present. Full presence allows us to be present to the fullness of our being.

As I mentioned, Jesus links "judge not" to being forgiving and generous. When we forgive someone we no longer bind them to their past actions. When we are generous we trust in the infinite Source of our life and because of this we can share what we have been given. These are the qualities of openness that allows us to relate from our spiritual depth in God.

The judging that Jesus is warning us about is a specific type of judgment. A judgment that holds onto past hurts is not forgiveness. A judgment that is defensive and self protective is not generous. They divide our awareness into right/wrong, good/bad, acceptable/not acceptable, me/rejected me These kinds of judgments shut down our awareness, our openness to the entire situation in which we find our self..

Jesus is distinguishing negative judgments from neutral judgments. Our mind is always contrasting, comparing and interrelating our experiences. These are necessary functions in our knowing. Judgment, in the sense of comparing our experiences is not the problem. The problem is that we judge in a negative way. We mix the comparison in with our ego's need to dominate the situation by rational, abstract and negative evaluations.

Because we've lost awareness of our foundation in God we develop a hyper sensitivity in which most of our experiences are seen as threatening. This is where our negative judgments come from. Our negative judgments stem from the erroneous evaluation that we are separate beings who need to protect ourselves against other people, difficult situations and painful experiences. We feel a need to protect our self because we see ourselves as vulnerable to all of these external forces. All of this happens even before we are old enough to be aware of the attitudes we are creating. This is why our reactions feel so instinctual.

Making negative judgments are so interwoven in the fabric of our consciousness that we are no longer aware of them. Notice that very little escapes our judgments - other people, our self, our experiences and situations in which we find our self are all cast in a negative light.

We are distinguishing between neutral judgments (judgments with forgiveness and generosity) which come from our unconditional presence to a situation and negative judgments which are

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

mixed up with our ego's need to defend and attack. Our mind needs neutral judgments. To understand patterns in our life we have to understand their relationship to what has happened in our past. To do that, we have to place them next to each other to see how they are related. We need to compare and contrast them: how are they the same or different and if they are different, in what way are they different. In this process of interrelating by contrasting, a constant comparison is happening. We see similarities and differences and begin to uncover relationships between our experiences.

Neutral judgments are a way of being present to our self and the actions which express our self. As we pay attention with neutral awareness we begin to realize that most of our analysis of others is a projection of our own inner reality. Negative judgments, the "judge not" that Jesus is warning us about are mixed with fearful and angry self defensiveness. They drive us apart from our self, God and others. They are a wedge that separates us and feeds further fear and anger. Next week I'll write about learning to regain our ability for neutral judgments.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS - Judge Not - Part III

Jesus' way of being present comes from the Father's presence to him. Jesus is fully conscious of the divine unconditional Love that is the source and shared essence of his being. One of the earliest (2nd century) dogmatic formulas was "In Jesus the divine became human so that humans can become divine." Jesus is the prototype of our essence. In the human Jesus our divine essence is revealed.

Essential to understanding what this means for us is knowing that throughout our life our mind and our way of perceiving continues to develop in such a way that we are able to relate to more and more reality. We develop by learning to be present to all that is going on within us and around us. This is learning to "judge not."

We can shut down the broader and more inclusive realities that our mind is beginning to perceive as we develop, we shut down by becoming more rigid and then more defensive. We shut down by giving into fear and indulging our point of view. We are protecting the smallness of our perception against anything that does not fit into it.

When Jesus tells us to "judge not... be forgiving and generous," he is guiding us into allowing our mind and perceptions to develop and broaden the way they are meant to develop. The opposite of negative judgments is facing our self with an honesty that continues to be aware of and accept more and more of our reality - including our need to make negative judgments. At the same time our developing spiritual awareness awakens us to knowing that we are more than any of the judgments that our mind fabricates.

At this point we are at a crossroads. We can choose the road most taken, which is to tightly hold onto our narrow understanding and perceptions, dig in and defend our way of seeing and

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

understanding. Our developing awareness will react to this and we will end up waging an internal battle as well as hunkering down behind our external defenses

We can also follow our developing awareness and wake up to the realization that we'll never be able to change the outer world enough to make ourselves happy. This awareness can lead us to turning inward for answers. As we turn inward we pay attention to our feelings and begin to see connections between them and our history. We become aware of how our memories, neglected qualities, learned values and attitudes effect our outer life.

At this time the road to "judge not" becomes more attractive when we become tired of the pain of our external battles and the constrictions of our internal self perceptions. Other's among us begin to seriously consider this path when some part of our life begins to crumble.

It may be the loss of our job, a breakdown in our relationships, or burn out due to stress. We feel humbled. We are parched, in an emotional draught with little or no energy to continue. And yet we are surviving! We are more than all that is going wrong in our life. We are a spiritual and eternal being and our spirit is beckoning us to fuller life of living from our spirit.

Our present reality is the soil out of which God is growing us. This is because of God's forgiveness, generosity and mercy, but mostly it is because God sees us and loves us for all of who we are and God knows that what we judge as defective is a necessary, if temporary, part of our developing. This is what Jesus means when he cautions us not to try to pull the weeds out of the wheat - because we'll destroy both weeds and wheat.

The actual ability to let go of the habit of negative judgments begins with the recognition that despite our awareness of the caustic effects of negative judgments, a major development in our personality is needed. Paradoxically this can bring us to another spiritual crossroads: "I've done all this work, I have a good life and have attained much of what I thought would make me happy; I understand, accept and appreciate myself more than ever; so why do I still feel dissatisfied?"

Neutral judgments, being present to what is happening without negative and positive evaluations, allow the free flow of God's love on which our spirit thrives. It also allows our perceptions to continue to widen, to become more inclusive and aware of more and more of our reality. Our awareness of our negative judgments will help us give them less power in our life and make more room for neutral judgments.

The more deeply we search into the problems of our life the more ambiguous the answers become. We find that it is often impossible to find a precise cause to our behavior and we intuitively know that there is nothing we can do about it. Here "Judge not" is more about being generous, forgiving and learning to trust God and accept God's unconditional love. We begin to recognize that growth, development, becoming more freely loving and awakening to God's intimacy is already the source of our living, already developing within us. But it seems that we have to go through the whole process of coming to and being taught to "let go and let God." I wish the path were simpler and more direct but that isn't my experience.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS - Judge Not
Presence without Judgments

Our lives are an expression of God's love. We are being loved into existence at this moment. God's love is the basic creative, life giving, relationally bonding and healing energy of creation. We are meant to experience this divine loving energy directly. When we do we will experience the freshness of life happening within us. For some this is a physical experience of joyous energy being released throughout their being; for others an emotional clearing that releases inner peace, courage and action; and for still others an insight that creates a new way of seeing, understanding and responding.

We also experience this divine energy in our desire for truth. Our desire is an expression of God's joy in revealing Divine Presence as the Loving Source of our lives. Our deep inner need to know the reality of our lives is an expression of God's delight in expressing God's self as our lives. We experience this divine-human partnership when we are taught by God to become fully present to our immediate experience.

Here is a help for being present to our experience in the moment. You can simply close your eyes and pay attention or you may want to write your experiences.

Begin with simply being aware of the various elements in your experience: bodily sensations, emotional feelings, mental activity, what you see and hear.

Write what you are aware of and notice how your awareness affects your experience.

Notice what draws you attention in your experience and then look more closely at that, describing what you see.

Be aware of when you relate to your subject of inquiry through old ideas or positions and when you experience it with more immediacy and freshness.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

See if you can tune in to the sense of immediacy and openness of direct contact with your experience in contrast to the familiar feel of what you already know.

What is it like to be in touch with and perceiving your experience so directly?

What do you feel you have to give up in order to be so immediate?

What draws you back into the familiar territory of ordinary knowledge?

This will help you learn to allow your experiences to be, allow things to emerge, to change, to transform, without trying to control how this should happen. You want to feel where you are at this moment, what you see, experience, come to recognize it for all of what it is. Understanding will come with this presence. You are allowing God to grow you out of the fertile soil of the present moment.

Note: This series on "Judge not" has often rambled. If you would like a more or less coherent summary of these reflections on judgments please contact me at KCSSR@aol.com and I will send it to you.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - **PATHWAYS / Stillpoint**

INNER VIEWS

Why is it?

Why is it that we who are already united to God feel a need to seek God?

When we believe that our ego and the stories it spins are reality we are living in our thoughts rather than reality. Our thoughts are fear based. Reality is divinely based. Reality as it is, when it is not filtered through our thinking, is a continuation of God loving creation into existence.

Thoughts act as a lens through which we see ourselves and the world in which we exist. Our story creates our sense of self as a separate and unique person. The unintended consequence of creating our separate identity is that we create separation from God, each other and the immediacy of our self.

The story we spin to tie our thoughts together interprets the present moment of our life according to past events and future hopes based on past events. These events are times and situations in which we feel we have failed. We remember them so that we can avoid further failure and prepare to act if they arise again. They are based on the assumption that I can change something outside of me and in this way find freedom from fear. We have created a desperate story of our self as one lone person left to our own devices. No wonder we're anxious.

We can't get rid of our thoughts. But we can meet them with awareness and then they let go of us. When we let go of our thoughts and stories God's presence arises as a calm peacefulness. We grow as we discover that all the concepts and judgments we take for granted are distortions of the way things really are. This is love; compassion, presence and deep care, embracing all that is and finding that "earth is crammed with heaven."

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

When we bring awareness to our stories they become more and more transparent allowing us to be consciously present to the Divine reality of our life. God is God, and will not allow us to worship an idol made from our ideas. Growing, developing, healing, becoming fully alive, and holiness happen no through knowing new information but by living in a totally new way.

Instead of getting rid of thoughts we need to accept them as part of ourselves. As we do accept more and more of our reality we will notice a new consciousness begin to dawn within us. We become our self more through the way we relate to our life than through what we do to our self. We still need to be aware of and learn to accept our wounds and the constrictions that we create in reaction to our past, but a shift in consciousness is taking place.

We are learning to live in and love the mystery of our life for all of what it is. We are created to be mystics, to love unconditionally as we are loved. We reach out to God by trusting that there is no distance between God and ourselves. We no longer have to reach but simply learn to accept this moment as God's Presence. The Way of Jesus is an intimate relationship with God that is lived out in all of our relationships. It is not about perfection but about maturity, humanity and wisdom.

When we live with "it" (our life as it is) we find God.
Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - **PATHWAYS / Stillpoint**

INNER VIEWS

Faith is not a form we fit ourselves into,
but something we discover going on in our lives.

Jesus' life is not a fact to be acknowledged,
but a reality to be encountered in the way we
live our lives.

"Blest are they who have not seen and have believed." Actually that's you and me. This blessing is directed at us: we who believe in Jesus without seeing him. We are blessed when we know the deep inner Truth of our lives and our noblest actions..

We are surrounded, enveloped, and suffused with God. That is reality. In fact it is so much reality that we can no longer experience its realness. Like the air we breath, it is so much a part of our experience that we take it for granted. This is why Jesus blesses us, so that we can become aware of the gift that is ours.

Because we are suffused with God, truth is less a matter of correct ideas but more a matter of what transforms our lives in the direction of greater freedom, life and selfless love. And the way to know this truth is to surrender to it.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

In the Gospels we see that Jesus' basic agenda for salvation is to surrender himself into all of creation. He breathes his Holy Spirit, he surrenders his breath into the disciples lungs and our lungs. This is exactly what he did in Gethsemane, he surrendered himself into God. It is what he did on the cross, he surrendered his breath into death, and now even death is filled with life. His agenda is this: "There is nothing that will not be filled with my life; there is no one who will be isolated for the Father's love."

He surrenders his breath into the disciples with this word, "Peace." And then he explains its meaning; "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive sins, they are forgiven; if you hold them bound they are held bound."

Forgiveness means this; "Let nothing stand between us, let no past deed separate us, I surrender myself into your hands. Peace is yours." Christ will allow nothing, not death, not abandonment, not past failures, not the disciples fear and betrayal stand between ourselves and God's love. And because we are made in God's image it is our nature to surrender ourselves in the same way.

"If you do not forgive": This is not a condition, as if to imply that in some cases the community might withhold forgiveness. Rather it is a statement of fact that without you, forgiveness will not happen. And when you bind another to their past you are also bound to that past. Because we are Jesus' risen body our actions have lasting significance.

And so Christ's words about binding and forgiving sins are not a description of the Institutional Church's authority, but a revelation of our human nature. We become fully human and our lives are transformed by forgiving all that isolates us from one another. Only God can forgive sins and Jesus does not mean to give us arbitrary power over God. But now that Jesus has surrendered himself totally into our lives his life giving presence takes on form through our lives. Like all great blessings it is also a responsibility.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - STILLPOINT / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

Following Jesus as Adults

"Follow me," Jesus invites us. But later he says "Not everyone who calls me Lord will enter the Kingdom...." Jesus expects us to do more than simply walk around after him or blindly imitate him. He wants us to live with the same consciousness of God's intimacy, immediacy, and love as he lived. This means that we need to turn inward and become aware of both the inspirations and obstacles that inhabit our inner self.

In the gospels the people who met Jesus had to wrestle with this basic question: "Who is this man?" They heard him speak with authority, cast out demons, cure the sick, feed the crowds and give himself to all those in need. But he did many of these things outside the boundaries of their religious codes.

He spoke in God's name and offered forgiveness - that was blasphemy. He healed on the Sabbath, which broke a commandment. He touched, ate and drank with the impure, which made

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

him "impure" according to their rituals. "Who is this man?" had no obvious or easy answer. The most honest statement they could make was that he was certainly confusing.

Confusion and chaos were part of his method. He told parables and stories that seemed innocent at first - but there was always a seed of chaos buried within them. He told about the Kingdom of God: it is like a mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds. But it grows into a shrub big enough to provide shade and shelter to the birds of the air.

That's a sweet image. But the farmers and gardeners in the crowd knew that a mustard seed grows wildly and takes over the whole garden. It grows crazily and drives everything else out. What is Jesus talking about?

This confusion and chaos also meant that they could not use Jesus for their own gains. He would not fit into their agenda and worldview. If they wanted to follow him they would have to trust him - on his terms. If they chose to trust him they found he would be like a mustard seed in their spirit. His love and compassion and generosity would grow wildly, beyond their control. Following was the way to a relationships with him that became a way of experiencing his consciousness. They found themselves in the mystery of God's love and everything in their world changed.

So, if we're going to follow Jesus we might expect some of the same. Except, it's been turned around for us. Instead of starting with the question "Who is this man?" we start with an answer. He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God made flesh and blood to reveal God and our redemption in God. We've been taught the dogma, the conclusion of following him.

But we've missed learning the meaning that comes through contemplating our own questions. Instead of the divine mystery that makes us vulnerable to a world greater than our own, we have a concept that we naturally try to exploit for our gain - even though he told us not to tempt God.

If you think of all the things that attract your allegiance and engage your loyalty you will notice that the attraction contains the hope for making your life better. There is a practical expectation that gives us the energy to pursue and dedicate ourselves to this pursuit. If we are going to give our time and effort, discipline and dedication to a task we expect a practical outcome. We expect it to make a difference.

Maybe following Jesus has to return us to the questions so that the answers will make a difference. Maybe, instead of proclaiming our dogmas, which if we haven't questioned them are actually just opinions, we should start with our hopes and fears. What do we hope for in our lives? What fears act as obstacles to our hopes? And what wisdom does Jesus offer? My experience is that this way of following Jesus needs a community of people rooted in faith, expressed in beliefs, but free to seek and question. Jesus offers so much more than answers. We need each other's support to respond.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - STILLPOINT / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

LOVE: Sharing in Divine Life

What if God declared today "Free from Commandments Day?"

What would you do if you were free to do whatever you want? No repercussions, no consequences, no punishment or rewards, just do what you want.

What would you do if you were free to do what was most satisfying, most life giving, most healing and nourishing to your deepest needs and desires? That's where Jesus is leading us, to intimacy with the God who loves us unconditionally.

Love is not a sweet emotion, but an expression of our true self created in the divine image to be unconditionally loved and loving. Love is already ours because we are God's. Our desire to be loved and to be loving is ours because God's love creates and energizes our personal uniqueness - its what we're made of.

Because our love is a sharing in God's love our love is an openness to life as it is in its fullness. It's an expansion of our heart to receive generously and genuinely. In order to love the way we're made to love we have to open ourselves to both the beauties and the limitations of human life. Love must be unconditional because God is unconditional and God is our loving. Attachments and judgments constrict God's love in us, we are free to see the person in their true self. When we let go of our conditions we are free to let God's love work in us.

Love has more to do with seeing clearly than with action. We have to see the person as they are beyond our expectations, judgments and personal worldview before we can truly love them. We cannot love without seeing them for all of who they are. Action without seeing leads to constriction, rigidity, fear and attempts to impose our will on the other person's life.. When we can see a person as they really are true love and compassion will arise spontaneously. To see and accept a person for all of who they are is to be open to God's loving in us. The willingness to see and accept the person for all of who they are is the growing edge of all relationships.

Love is God's presence between us bonding us to one another. Love takes place in the vulnerable space, the emptiness in which both of us belong just as we are. This emptiness receives both of us and does not impose either of us on the other. This emptiness is actually Divine Presence binding us together. It is the loving God receiving us unconditionally and being our unconditional love. Our love for each other is God's love for all of us. Love is communion, union between us as unique expressions of God's love.

Love between humans always begins within the confines of our ego's awareness. We love for what we expect to receive. But love also has an intuitive dimension that comes from and nudges us towards its source within God's loving. When love remains between egos it eventually collapses in upon itself because it becomes self-serving and isolating. Its not big enough to

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

receive the person for all of who they are. When love frees us to the vulnerability of opening our true self to another we find ourselves in the intimacy of God.

This talk about unconditional love seems incredibly idealistic and abstract. And it means very little until we experience it for yourself. If you would like a prayerful meditation that can help sensitize you to the reality of God's unconditional love for you please contact me and I'll send it to you. KCSsR@aol.com or 312-642-2498

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - STILLPOINT / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

We are made for Paradise - on Earth

Where there is love there is the promise of paradise.

All of us want to find that paradise where we belong just because we are us. Our innate and intuitive desire is to be loved unconditionally for all of who we are. Intuitively we are aware that we are more than we know. We want someone who can mirror our unknown self as well as those parts of our self hidden in our dark shadows. We not only want love, we desperately need to be loved unconditionally.

We have had moments of this unconditional love, when we're felt expanded beyond our boundaries. We feel the bliss of warm energy enlivening and liberating us. It comes as a gift from beyond us, lifts us beyond our fears and even beyond our hopes. We are carried beyond our self. In these fleeting moments we have awakened to our existence in the heart of God.

"God is love," sounds so simple and sweet and maybe even trite - until love happens in our lives. "God is love" means that God gives what is most intimate and essential of God's own nature as the energy of our living and loving. This is the only true source of everything we call Christian, holy, healing, moral, spiritual, purposeful or meaningful.

Love is not something we can generate for our self. We must first be loved and then we have love to give. We are love to give because we are loved into existence at every moment by God. If we want to love as Jesus loved, as Jesus teaches us, as he himself lives, loves and is loved we begin by accepting our shared reality as God's beloved.

It's all one. To love Jesus we must be able to love one another. Love for one another comes from Jesus' love, who himself is loved by the Father. As are we. Jesus is the Beloved child of God, as are we.

We all want unconditional love. But in reality we have adapted to a way of life that is less than loving, unconditional and joyful. Often we are comfortable this way and don't see much hope of anything better. Maybe we've failed in love, been wounded by love, or are simply bored with out

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

present love. In most cases love has become entangled with our ego which wants love to exist on its conditioned terms. This leaves our spirit numb and engulfed in the haze of our mind.

Talk of unconditional love may be inspiring but that inspiration just leads to frustration until we experience the reality of love for our self. Unconditional Love exists and we exist because we are loved into unconditionally into existence. But we need more than beliefs or hope. We need to attune ourselves to this love.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - STILLPOINT / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

As I try to focus on writing this I'm thinking of a rich, moist piece of chocolate cake. Not a socially correct slice, but a slab with white chocolate between the layers and a butter and cream dark chocolate frosting. And then a big scoop of French vanilla ice cream. Our desires can lead us to unconditional love

Our desires come from the intimate, lively and expansive center of our spirit. - that place where God is loving us into existence at this moment. These desires awaken us to the wholeness of who we are beyond the confines of the ego. Our desires drive us with a yearning for meaning, depth, and unconditional intimacy. Since this expands us beyond ourselves it leaves us vulnerable. In its aching desire to live unconditionally, to give and receive love with fluid freedom our spirit bursts the confines of the ego.

The trick is to turn the path of desire from external things to the deeper layers of desire. Begin by paying attention to how fulfilling specific desires are. Our deepest desires create a sense of harmony, freedom, lightness, and peace when they are acknowledged. Lesser desires quickly leave us frustrated.

We come to a time in our lives when our desire awakens to a need for something beyond anything we have found. What we have accumulated in our life is simply not enough. And what we can imagine no longer attracts us. The grass is no longer greener on the other side of the fence. There is the only this certainty left to guide us- nothing satisfies us. Our spirit has pushed itself into our awareness and demands the love it is made for. This may not be a new desire, but for some reason it has now become an insistent necessity.

E.B. White said: "I arise in the morning torn between the desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. That makes it hard to plan the day." Desires need newness and freshness. They are dulled by repetition. Even chocolate cake becomes boring when we have it "too often." We see this happening in relationships, between couples who deeply love each other. The standard advice is to do something new and exciting to refresh their love.

But couples who have loved for decades will tell you that love has to do with coming to know each other more fully and more intimately Love by its nature must be unconditional. Partners need to be open to learn and accept their beloved for all of who they are. Judgments,

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

expectations, analysis all kill love by conditioning love, by limiting it to the confines of our ego. When we let go of judgments we relinquish resistance to what is and become unconditionally present.

We are vessels of love, made to receive and give God's personal existence as the loving energy of our lives. Our conditioned desires become obstructions to the infinite generosity that is God's love. We are made for all or nothing.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

Let it unravel.

"You must love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30).

Loving is not as easy or straightforward as it sounds. Love is a quality of our soul, not simply a choice of our ego. We cultivate our soul by making space in our ego, by letting go of ourselves as the center of our lives and receiving the love that is creating us at every moment. We have to let our motivations unravel so that Trinity's love can work its gracious way within us.

The last time I read this gospel at Mass I was prepared to say a few words about love as an act of generosity in response to Trinity's generosity towards us. When I walked into the sacristy to vest I was immediately greeted by one of our parishioners who supplements his income by weaving tales of woe for money.

I recognized him but he didn't seem to recognize me. He told me about his grandmother who had died three times in the last year. I don't carry money when I'm in church., mostly as an excuse: "Sorry I don't have any money to give you." And the man was no longer interested in talking to me.

That irritated me but I can understand his reaction, it's all about the survival of his life as he knows it. And it reminded me of my own fears. I remembered when I was six years old driving with my parents through a section of Omaha where the drunks slept off their liquor. It scared me, I was afraid that it could happen to me. And I promised myself I will do whatever I need to do to be a "good boy" and not be a "bum." This feeling of our shared vulnerability and humanness is compassion. Pity is feeling sorry for someone; compassion is the vulnerability of experiencing our shared humanness.

I would love to do something to "really" help him but I had no clue of what to do and that frustrated me. At the same time I notice that I'm worried about me and worried about me following Jesus when me is not the point. This man is the point, he's what matters.

I bring all of this baggage with me as I try to respond honestly and sincerely to Jesus' words: "Love one another. There are no simple answers or remedies. Charitable organizations tell us that giving this man money just contributes to further drinking or drugs. I believe them but

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

sometimes I give him a few bucks just to get him out of my way. Sometimes I give him a few bucks because that's what I would want if I were in his shoes.

I'm certainly not consistent. And I don't know what the wise and loving thing is to do. But in letting it unravel I am more aware of and less filled with my pretensions

Meanwhile the most honest thing I can do is to let my motivations unravel. This is a way of being aware without judging, analyzing or feeding into my prejudices and judgments. In letting my motivations unravel I relax my ego and allow room for the Spirit's guidance and the Creator's love.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

To tell the truth,
The whole truth and nothing but the truth,
So help me God.

Unless we really learn to pay attention, give our heart and soul to the truth, the best we can do is repeat our opinions. For many their point of view is enough. But if we want to know God's unconditional love, if we want to respond with love, we need to develop our capacity for "the whole truth." The Way of Jesus makes room for God in our lives by cultivating a curious and open desire for becoming aware of the whole truth of our experience just as it is.

Ultimately, healing involves unlearning the patterns that block our natural openheartedness from shining forth...We need help to get out of our way.
Receiving god - Jason Shulman p. 85

This is why Jesus invites us into a relationship with our Father. A relationship is an experience that is bigger than facts and information and beliefs. A relationship is never static but grows by sharing ourselves more fully and transparently. Jesus wants us to share his consciousness and his perception so that we can make room for the boundless intimacy of God.

This might sound vague and abstract but it will make sense as we begin to explore the expanses of truth. For now it is enough that we want to know and tell the truth. God will patiently teach us to open our soul through trust. Truth is not the same thing as facts. We can know facts but truth takes us into the infinity of God's reality.

We begin to open to the truth when we recognize that our point of view is a partial truth - maybe the best we can do, but partial nonetheless. As we cultivate openness and pay attention to reality beyond our point of view we will become aware of the barriers implicit in our ignorance. Ignorance means that we simply are not aware of the limits of our beliefs.

Our mind works by breaking our experience into half-truths. In our mind the glass is either half full or half empty. We just can't get into our heads that an eight ounce glass with four ounces of

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

water is both half- full and half-empty. That's closer to the truth. But the half-truth is much more comfortable because it fits the natural tendencies of our mind. This is why we need God's help to approach truth. We need courage and encouragement to let go of our barriers.

If you want a clear example of how our minds reduce the truth to predetermined beliefs watch the two news channels, MSNBC and FOX. In theory they are both reporting the same events. Their interpretations, however, differ vastly. And the consistency of their interpretations exposes the limited perceptions that shape their biases and rants. They both claim to possess the "truth" but the loudness of their certainty betrays their precarious position. When Jesus' disciples were trying to get at the "truth" of what happened in his death and resurrection Jesus' first words to them were "Peace be with you." Peacefulness allows room to wonder, to be aware and to explore the mystery in which we find ourselves and human/divine children of our Father.

All points of view are potentially imperialistic: that is, all aspire to be the point of view from which one can survey the whole.

The Sun - John A. Miles

But here's the point where God's help makes a difference. It's enough that we become aware of the limits of our mind. As soon as we do this we can begin to look beyond the edges of our mind and its thoughts. We can look for what we're leaving out. This stretches our mind and makes room in our soul. The more room we have, the more capacity that develops in us, the more intimately we receive our unconditioned Creator and Lover. We'll never "know" the truth but we will learn to make more room for Truth in our lives.

For things to reveal themselves to us, we need to be ready to abandon our views about them." Being Peace - Thich Nhat Hahn

Now this is a truth worth telling.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

We are literally more than we think.

Go with your bliss.
Do your own thing.
Love yourself.
Listen to your heart.

Good advice, but how do I do these things? What is my bliss if I've never felt blissful? I've tried lots of things to make me happy and they are nice but temporary. How do I do my own thing? Do I even own a thing? Is there something that is uniquely mine to do? I've done so many things, I've worked hard so what more can I do? How do I love myself? By trying harder to be good? And how do I hear my heart when all this chatter is going on all around me and in my head?

What all these have in common is that they cannot be pursued in themselves. There is no way to accomplish them. They involve a shift in every aspect of our being. This shift begins deep

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

within, below the surface of our awareness, out of reach of our choices, and when it does happen it's a grace, a gift that we cannot bestow on our self. We become our self more through the way we relate to our life than through what we do to our self.

Following the Way of Jesus involves us in a relationship to all of our self as being loved into existence by Trinity. It is the Way of Unconditional Love. It is an apprenticeship in the wisdom that comes from being present to our whole self. This is not something we can force to happen. Force returns us to our ego and our ego limits us to thoughts about our self. Our ego only deals with our partial self. Healing comes with wholeness. And wholeness is more than we can carry in our head. We are literally more than we think.

We have learned to derive our sense of self from the workings of our mind. We see ourselves basically as a mind-made narrative - a collection of memories, stories, opinion, expectations and viewpoints. This form of self knowledge focuses on our limitations, what more we must become. It tells us about the ways we fail and fall short of ideals. This is helpful in defining goals but harmful in defining our self. It pits us against our self, trying to overcome our self in order to feel better about our self. As Jesus said, "A house divided against itself crumbles."

Almost all the advice we get about becoming a better person is based on approaching ourselves from our ego. This will always leave us short and lacking the energy and motivation to continue. And in most cases it sets up an opposite (shadow) part of our self that fights against our highest goals. The old saying, "The way to hell is paved with good intentions," is so true. But the way back is paved with humility.

Humility learns from Trinity's love to deal with our whole self, without judgment or recrimination. And humility teaches us to rely on Trinity's Spirit as our guide towards development.

The beginning of waking up to Trinity loving us into existence is experiencing our self as more than our parts.

This experience of our self does not come from new ideas about our self. Thoughts return us to our mind and separate us from the loving energy that is truly our self. But we can move beyond our thoughts by letting go of these thoughts and paying attention to who is thinking. We can pay attention to ourselves as being aware of these thoughts..

Try this out. Who is here? Right now, sitting where you are, reading these words, take a few moments to settle yourself, relax, and sense yourself looking at this page. Can you see the print on this page? It is seen, right? But seen by whom? In this very moment, beyond concepts or images who is seeing? Shift your attention for just a moment from the words on the page back to yourself. You might become aware of thoughts and feelings going through you. You are aware of them just like you are aware of the words on the page. You are not them you are awareness of them.

Who is aware? You might be aware of your body, your thoughts or your feelings at this moment but you are always more than these, you are the awareness. Who am I really? Notice this: am I

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

my thoughts, the thoughts that I am thinking? No, thoughts come and go: I am aware of my thoughts, so I must be more than my thoughts. "I" remain even as they change. "I" remain because I am an expression of Trinity loving me.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

Be ready for surprises on the Spiritual Path

Peek-a-boo!

Babies get this joke. And they laugh every time.

Our soul becomes liberated as we get the joke. We've been covering our own eyes and all we need to do is move our thoughts out of the way. Peek-a-boo! Surprise! Here we are! And here is Trinity loving us.

A joke catches us off guard and out of our mind's expectations. We get a joke when we stop taking our thoughts so seriously and literally and accept both the absurdity and tenderness of our life.

*** Two silk worms had a race. They ended up in a tie.

Getting the joke is where we meet God loving us into existence. Spiritual insights are always awakenings, and they release a peaceful joy and energy (grace) that move us to live freshly. Trinity's presence is like a joke. It catches us off guard over and over again because we don't expect Trinity to be loving us this consistently. Peek-a-boo, here's Trinity. And when the surprise makes us laugh we share a little of Trinity's joy in loving us.

Our spiritual life is about peek-a-boo moments, where Trinity is suddenly known in a surprise that radiates joy.

Surprise! In our spiritual world we receive by letting go.

Surprise! We are filled with emptiness.

Surprise! We become more spiritual by becoming more human.

Surprise! We are strong with Trinity-ness when we are weakest, when we are loved without reason and when we are in need.

Surprise! We are humble when we accept Trinity loving all of who we are unconditionally because love is Trinity's motive.

Our story becomes more real as we surrender it to the retelling of the Word made flesh. (John 1:1-14)

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

***I could not bear to touch God with my hand when he came within reach.... God solved my blessed agony... he turned my body into his. Meister Eckhart

The joke is on us. Trinity is already here, we are already living in love. All we need to do is enjoy the surprise.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

The hardest job in the world is to be simply and fully human.

If your legs were put on backwards how would you sit, walk or run?

Our knee only bends one way. This limitation is its purpose and value. Our knee serves us so nobly because of its limitations. Accepting our reality is the beginning of loving our self with Trinity's wisdom. The freedom that Trinity's love imparts is ultimately the ability to be simply and fully human. We are free to be completely human. We are not free to be super heroes, aliens or cartoon creatures. We are free to be ourselves, with all of our imperfections, wounds, limits, possibilities, sincerity and goodness..

Learning about and embracing our limitations is the gateway to our true greatness. It is a sort of undressing in the service of truth, a dropping of adornment in order to see the true being adorned in light Be naked. You have nothing to lose but pride and fear.

This does not mean that we are free to act out all our insecurities, uncertainties, and partial selves. It means we must constantly be kind to our poor, unevenly developed, incomplete, and sometimes confused self.

Being human in relationship to our loving Creator is what we are meant for. Loving Trinity and relating from the reality of our incompleteness is how Trinity works in our life. It is the way Trinity's perfection is given flesh and blood in this imperfect world.

When we have an openhearted attitude toward ourselves, we work with everything that comes – from insight to resistance, from boredom to enthusiasm, from tears to laughter. We are in the arms of the Great Mother who is all things, who accepts all things, and who moves all things toward completion.

***" I arise in the morning torn between the desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. That makes it hard to plan the day."

E.B. White

It all starts with learning compassion for our ego/mind. It is doing two important jobs at once. Its first job is to provide for our survival. At the same time it has the job of scoping out our place in the larger world, which often puts it in agonizing conflict with itself.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Both tasks are essential. Accepting their reality is the wisdom of the Way of Jesus.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS
The Will of God

Ding dong!

You open the door and a grim person stands before you in a dark suit, heavily starched white shirt and blue striped tie. They hand you an envelope. "The will of God," they tell you.

You try to lighten up the moment with a joke: "The will of God, I didn't know he died."

No response, not even a frown.

You look at the envelope and read the words neatly typed under your name: "The Will of God."

The person leaves and you close the door still holding the envelope. You open the envelope, pull out the tri-folded white linen paper and open it with some apprehension.

"Surprise me," it says.

Many of us were brought up with the idea that the "will of God" demands that we do something that we're reluctant to do. Somehow we feel that what we want is contrary to what God wants of us. I remember asking in sixth grade: "Why did God make me the way I am and wants me to be different than the way I am?" Sister's answer was "Because you're a sinner and God wants you to do his will." That didn't answer my question. And I knew deep down inside that I just wanted to get along and wanted God to love me. I certainly didn't want to pick a fight with God or the church authorities who defended God's sovereignty.

But when we read the Gospels we hear Jesus talking about "repentance" which literally means to turn around and see in a new perspective. The repentance involved in understanding the "will of God" has to do with a turning around in our understanding of what it means to "love God."

At the beginning of our spiritual path the "love of God" is an act of our mind and our will. We come to understand that it's a good thing to "love God," and we decide to do just that. We might even be able to stir up some emotions about God. This is basically an act of our ego, its something that we work at producing within ourselves.

Repentance, however, means that we move from ego to soul. Soul is an act of getting our ego out of the way, recognizing our basic emptiness, being aware that our ego can only go through the motions. Repentance begins with the humble awareness that the "love of God" that we generate with our ego is a pale imitation of love. Real love can only be received (our soul is the receptive

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

vessel of love) and God who is Love is the source of all real love. Our soul has to gradually learn to trust and receive the gift of God's presence as the source of its own loving.

This is why St. Alphonsus Liguori tells us that the will of God is attached to deeply intimate prayer. Not prayers to do the will of God but prayer which gradually opens us to intimacy with God. We begin to understand that we are loved unconditionally and we begin to experience God's love as an energy of love flowing into and through us.

Alphonsus tells us that doing the will of God is not about asking our self "Did I do right or wrong?" Doing "the will of God" asks the question "Am I doing the loving thing?" God's will is looking out for the good of our whole self in the larger context of our self as a contributor to the common good. Simply put God's will means re-imagining our self in the image and likeness of Trinity.

In these terms the "will of God" is no longer something external to our desires and needs but the fullest expression of our desires and the receptive trust opening our self to God's expansive reality. The will of God takes us out of our small self-contained and ego-driven world into God's world of generosity, healing, uniting and life-affirming love. It changes our life from an act of drudgery to one of living grace.

Here is Wilkie Au's, a professor of theology at Loyola Marymount University, description of the will of God.

The word which we translate into English as "will" comes from both a Hebrew and a Greek word which means yearning. It is that yearning which lovers have for one another. Not a yearning of the mind alone or of the heart alone but of the whole being. A yearning which we feel is only a glimmering of the depth of the yearning of God for us.

Thus, the will of God is dynamic, personal love urging us along the path that leads to union with the Lord.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

We're not done growing up. We may be done growing physically. We can even be at the point in our life when we are declining physically. But we're not done spiritually. Our soul is eternal and can expand to receive more and more - forever.

One of the ways we continue to expand is through our mind. Not simply by receiving new or more information but by expanding our capacity to make sense of our experience and by integrating multiple perspectives in a more inclusive awareness. This is more than an understanding, it is a new ability to perceive and relate to reality as it is.

Jesus was not concerned about teaching new doctrines but with pointing us into the mystery of divine intimacy, an intimacy that makes our souls more inclusive in our relationships with

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Trinity and one another. We participate in this by loosening the rigid and literal character of our ideas so that they have the suppleness to embrace more of our experience and express more of our personality.

The basic doctrines of our Christian faith are by their very nature expansive. They don't define as much as they describe complementarities which must be held together so that we can relate to their mystery.

Our belief in the Incarnation is one of these. Its official declaration basically tells us that we can't reduce Jesus to being merely human nor can we consider him as only divine. The way we put divinity and humanity together has been a continued dialogue for the last 2,000 years. Some of the early theologians put it this way; "Jesus became human so that humans could become divine." Our beliefs serve Jesus' revelation when they keep seemingly opposites together. Jesus describes this as using "new wineskins."

We become more receptive to Trinity and our own reality when we begin to understand ourselves as existing in relationship to Trinity. This is a huge step. It develops from beliefs about God to relating to Trinity with all the fluidity, complexity, intimacy and challenge involved in any relationship. We are taken out of our small little self-defined world into divine reality. This is far more satisfying because it can open our lives to the warmth, nurturing and challenges of being loved and loving.

I believe that this relationships takes on richness and intimacy as we begin to understand Trinity's love as the basic energy of our life. I say "I believe" because this is my experience, but I'm not sure if its normative of everyone's development. I know that the differences in our personalities profoundly effects the ways we experience, make sense of and relate to the divine reality in which we find ourselves.

The shift involved in this perspective begins to cast our relationship to Trinity in a new light. It changes from an external relationship in which Trinity is out there as someone to whom we relate, to the reality of meeting Trinity as the source of our existence. We begin to know Trinity in the profound intimacy of our living energy. We are because we are being loved into existence by Trinity. We love because we have learned to let Trinity's love flow through us to others.

Our belief in the meaning of Jesus' Incarnation, Jesus as the divine child who saves us by becoming one of us, becomes intimately personal. The Savior who was born to us has been reborn within us, born in the past and reborn in the present of our flesh and blood. The Savior we hoped for outside of our self has become our inner reality. The astonishing revelation is that this is how our Father saves and heals us.

Jesus is as much like us as we are like ourselves. He develops and matures just as we develop and mature. His life is an experience of all that it means to be human, including the wondering and wandering, the learning from experience, and the reliance on others to help him become aware of who he is meant to be.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

We can no longer understand the crib and Incarnation in an analytical, abstract way. Each of us is welcomed into the stories of Jesus' birth as tales of our own heritage and identity. The wonder of the crib and Incarnation is that our Father saves us by pouring divinity into our humanness. The Word becomes Flesh, divinity becomes human, and the unconquerable God gives divinity into the vulnerability of our humanity. We are living a mystery that resonates in our deepest self and yet is always more than we can know. We intuit its reality but never fully grasp its intimacy and personal immediacy. Its meaning comes from the deepest level of our own reality and takes us into divine reality.

This casts our life in a new complexity for we possess a dual destiny, human and divine. When we begin to understand and love all of what it means for Jesus to be human we are brought heart to heart with the expansion of our identity and humbly accepting all of who we are. As humans we are limited to time and space. And because we are wounded human beings we are bound by fear, anger and defensive judgments. As humans we also burst forth into creation from the very heart of Trinity. We are loved unconditionally and expansively into existence. Our possibilities are unbounded and yet contained within the limits of our humanness.

You can see how this is both a divine vocation and a human dilemma. Our simple and childish world is thrust into the divine plan of salvation. And the marvelous reality is that our minds, as we are taught to trust them into our soul, are malleable enough to help us bring our personality and gifts to Trinity's creativity.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. PATHWAYS / STILLPOINT

INNER VIEWS
A Happy Wanderer

*I love to go a wandering along the mountain track
And as I go I love to sing, my knapsack on my back
Valderi, valdera, valderi, valder ha-ha-ha-ha-ha*

I remember part of this song from my childhood. At that time I had no clue that wandering would be my vocation. I'm not sure that wandering is going to be a life long vocation but I do know it is what is given to me at the moment. Actually I think that this is a transition from an identity and sense of self built on ego to an identity and sense of self reconnected to soul, to the living love of Trinity as the source of our existence.

Growing through creating an egoic sense of self is a necessary beginning to our life. At that time in our life we are concerned with establishing our personal (and superior or "correct / righteous") identity, learning and creating boundaries, and trying to feel secure as well as connected to important people and goals. In doing this we establish a place for ourself, gather with a group of friends and allies and lay out the foundation by which we interpret our place in this world.

This sense of self tends to be rigid, based on habitual patterns of acting and judging our life and other people's actions. And for many people this is enough. But there is also a natural inclination to move beyond this – if we are willing to pay attention to our inner self. This natural and inner

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

inclination is what we call “soul.” Our soul is not something we create because it comes from beyond ourselves. Our soul is the divine presence of Trinity loving us into existence and creating us as creative participants in their world. We don’t create our soul we awaken to it as our true reality.

I began to be aware of the reality of soul when I realized that my parent’s love was more than their words and actions. A friend of mine once wrote an article that began “Children are like sponges, they soak up all their parent’s messes.” That’s true, but we soak up more than our parent’s messes. We also soak up their energy and crave the positive energy that is their love. This is far more powerful than their affirmation or pride or expectations.

I have also experienced this in being with people who share from the vulnerability of who they actually are, who they are experiencing themselves to be. When they let down the façade of their egoic expectations of themselves and simply be themselves there is an energy that is charged with love and draws forth love. I have experienced this in meditation groups, retreat groups, discussion groups, communal reconciliation, at Mass and in simple conversations. Children, in their openness, innocence and spontaneity often bring this into our adult lives. These moments are usually very fleeting, but clearly real.

We catch these energies from being loved and from learning to be loving in our lives. This is one of Jesus’ great teachings, we become loving by giving love away to one another.

This is our soul in action. It is our deepest reality bursting into our conscious living. And this is what Jesus brings alive within us. The church, when it is living its true vocation nurtures this in our community. When it is trapped in egoic patterns of power and control and fearful contraction into the past, it shuts this down. Our primary place in life is to awaken to soul and learn to express its unconditional love through our lives.

The common reaction to learning to love is the question “How do I do this?” This is where it gets confusing because its not something that we can do. There is always a part of us that thinks we can learn about unconditional love like we learned to add and subtract. We want to learn form someone who knows. We want them to explain it to us so that we can know. But this doesn’t work.

Again, Jesus’ great teaching is that we learn to love by loving. As we try to learn to love we run into our resistances to receiving and giving love. This is basically what spirituality is about: How do we learn to love?

Love is more than a skill and we learn to love mostly by getting out of our way. In classical spirituality this is called “surrender,” “conversion,” “detachment,” and “trust.” Again, we can’t make these happen in our selves they are all bigger than us and so we must learn to receive them and we learn to receive them by wandering.

We can be a crabby wander, which usually means that we learned to get our way by being crabby with others and with our self. But there is no such thing as crabby love. Ultimately love is learning to accept and embrace all that is in our life. This is not something we can make

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

ourselves do. So we are left to wandering and in our wandering we catch love from Jesus. That's something to be happy about.

INNER VIEWS
 What I've learned.
 It's so simple

It is so exquisitely simple that it saturates our life without us even knowing. God is the love which is our living energy. And we love because we are an expression of God's loving. God's love is our life – its that simple.

Putting this into words already makes it more complex than it is. We are God's love, God's life energy is our self as love and as a need for love. God's loving is us. Whenever we are generous and caring and present without judgment we are experiencing and expressing God's loving happening as us.

God's loving is us. At this moment in my life I know this more directly and concretely than I have ever believed possible –because of you.

You and God are one in this. Your love, caring and generosity is God's love. God's' love is your love, caring and generosity. This surprisingly is the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus told us that we are God's intimacy, we exist because we are God's love being given to one another.

And here's the shock in all of this for me, I get to be part of it by being helpless. I've spent a great deal of my life, hopes, values, time and energy, trying to be helpful, trying to bring God's love into the reality of my living. This has been my hope and my quest for over 40 years. I haven't completely accomplished any of the things that I believe are necessary, are what I need and want to contribute. And yet when I am most helpless you've stepped forward. Your response has been so much more than seems possible to me. You are a blessing. And the blessing you give is so generous, loving and necessary that I know it radiate from a Source bigger than all of us. You are a revelation and a confirmation for me. But even more than that , you are you. Its that simple. Its about being who you are. That's what is divine.

This is how exquisitely simple it is. My heart bursts with gratitude – which is also God's love expressing itself between us.. Thank you so much. And thank you for sharing your divine goodness.

My guess is that you're response is "This is what we do, its no big deal;" or the phrase I've heard so often lately, "I'm just happy to help." And for me this is the point. It's not about deep soul searching or conversion. It's what we do because of who we are. Our basic being is God's love. God love us to be and we need to celebrate God's love.

INNER VIEWS
 Simple revisited

It's so simple. We are God's love expressing itself in the personality of our unique flesh and blood. God's love is our life.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

This is not meant to be an abstract ideal or a sentimental affirmation. We are all called to experience our life as being love, as the energy of God' loving us and through us at this moment. So why does it feel so complicated? What are all those things we've heard about sin and God's wrath? What do they have to do with it? Why do we struggle so hard to be better than we are? Why is it so hard to live the way that we should, or want to live?

One of the reasons that it seems more complicated than it is, is that God's love is so essential and natural to our lives that we don't need to pay attention to it. It's so familiar that we don't even notice it. It's the background against which our lives are loved and the energy of our living. It's like the air we breathe. We are constantly breathing and breathing is so natural that we don't need to pay attention. God's love is our living energy and it so consistent, abundant and constant that we don't usually pay attention.

On the other hand we often misinterpret our experience of God's love. God's love is constantly calling us to deeper intimacy, to a fuller awareness and response. The Holy Spirit guides us in the wisdom of receiving love and being love. We experience this as a churning within us, as desire and hunger for something – but we're not quite sure what. And this is where it gets confused because our culture steps in with its two cents. And all it has to offer is externals – power, possession, prestige. Get a new car, buy a bigger house, work eighty hours a week for a job promotion. So instead of recognizing this as a spiritual movement we pursue these externals: we work on our relationships, start a new exercise program or force a new diet on ourselves. We know something is missing and we're bombarded with distractions. But it takes an incredibly long time and a lot of frustration before it dawns on us that these aren't working.

I have a friend who has always been very spiritually oriented. She takes her faith seriously and participates actively. And then there came a time when, as she said, "I had everything I had hoped for and worked for." I had a great husband, wonderful children, the perfect house and good health, but I still felt empty." That emptiness finally forced her to look inside instead of outside. At first all she knew is that she wanted something and nothing satisfied her craving. She had been part of a women's faith group for years. They talked about their religion and how to live it but those were ideas. She longed to connect those ideas to her experience of living. When she realized what was happening it seemed so obvious and simple. But until then it was totally elusive. The emptiness she felt was her soul, the place where the Holy Spirit works in our lives guiding her to a more conscious intimacy with God.

Here's a quote from a good friend of mine who captures what is happening:

When a person becomes tired of all of the old ways of thinking; when the distractions that once succeeded in "getting an individual through the day" no longer seem to be working; when a person feels lifeless, uninspired, or begins to wonder "what's it all about?" When a person becomes aware of any of these feelings, that individual may well be responding to an ancient stirring within that is calling them to become engaged with life in a completely different way. If a person finds themselves listening to another person and nodding in agreement, all the while believing that there is something more, the "yes, but" of life, that person may well be experiencing an invitation and a call to a deepening spiritual growth and development. If this restlessness is from the Holy One,

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

if it is truly a spiritual call and invitation, it will not simply disappear or go away; some sort of response will be required of each man and women who hears the “call.”

It is this feeling, the sense within the human person that there is something more to life, this desire to seek and to journey, which propelled the patriarch Abraham, still later King David many centuries ago, and Mary Magdalene in the time of Jesus.

From a soon to be published book by Fr. Tom Santa, C.Ss.R.

This is what the church is meant to bring us to. This is where Jesus consistently points. It is the background of everything he said and did. It is the trajectory of his spirituality. It is all about an intimacy with the Trinity because that is what his life and his life experience is built on. When we awaken to its reality in our lives we are entering the Kingdom of God, the place where God’s will is done “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS
And complicated

It’s so complicatedly simple. God’s love is our life. The Trinity freely chooses to love one another and together they freely choose to love us into existence. Divine life and love is our living energy. It makes us exist. This means that our life is all about the flow of this energy. We let God’s love for us flow by loving God and other people, as well as the whole Universe. We let it flow by learning to love what is. We live because of this flow and we are meant to share it in our own unique personality and circumstances.

When we experience the flow happening in us we know the joy and peace of God’s love; we feel our unique place and purpose in our Father’s kingdom. We come to know the beloved ness of our existences. So why does it get bogged down?

The flow is impeded by our ego, the ideas we identify as being us, and the judgments we make in trying to impose these ideas on ourselves and others. Remember when Jesus said “Judge not lest you be judged”; this is what he was warning us about. When we judge we impose unreal demands on ourself and others. This is what traditional theology called “Pride.”

Ego is an essential part of our development. Before we can be truly and fully aware we need to develop a point of view to be conscious from. This is our sense of “me,” but a very small, narrow and rigid sense of me. We are also the awareness that surrounds our sense of me, the awareness of the thoughts that we are using to define me. The ego gives us the power of self-reflection as well as the ability to imagine the future. Yet nothing stifles the deeper life of the soul more than our over identification with the ego. When ego is in full control we can never really be emotionally healthy or experience a sense of genuine intimacy. Our awareness remains shallow, dominated by narrow self-interest, fear, and control; and we don’t have access to the generative forces of God’s love.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Pride is being tied to our ego and tied down by its small descriptions of reality. Pride is not necessarily boasting about our self. It is what we think we need to be in order to thrive and survive. It is a series of ideas we have about our self that we think we need to be special. But these are just ideas about who we think we should be. When we believe them we are confined by them.

Humility, on the other hand, is learning to be aware of and accept all of who we are. Humility is a soul awareness of our beauty, of our full self rooted in God's love. We loosen our sense of pride through forgiveness, gratitude, trust and dedication to the wholeness of what is true. Our ego and mind can only see one side of a coin. It is constantly dividing our reality into good and bad, either or. Our humble awareness allows us to be aware of the wholeness of the situation. It is a way of being present without letting thoughts stifle us. This is the reality that prayer and meditation open up to us. They involve us in awareness rather than reduce us to simplistic thinking.

Letting go of our pride begins when we become aware of the ideas we have about who we are and who we must be. This means stepping back and paying attention to the thoughts that go through our mind. We don't have to change them. All we have to do is pay attention without judging, analyzing or feeding them. At first this is difficult because these thoughts are so familiar and habitual but if we pay attention to the commentaries going on in our mind we'll begin to recognize that these are just stories we're spinning about ourself. Just being aware tells us that we are more than these stories and we are more than these stories can say about us. What we most truly are is an expression of God's love.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

"Simple" means paradox

There comes a time in our life when living the good life and being a good person is not enough for us. We come to feel fairly confident and competent in our life. We know that we can pretty much handle all that circumstances thrown at us. Its never easy but we are able to reclaim our balance through all the things that knock us around. We're like one of those punching bags we had as children: you knock it over and it pops back up.

It is at this point, when we've gained some right to be proud of who we've become that we begin to notice that something is missing. We have to some extent "arrived" but we've arrived with empty hands. We have a vague sense that something more is needed.. We crave something but don't know what it is. We think we should be satisfied but we're not. We may feel it physically as a restlessness or energy that won't let us relax

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

No matter how we experience this moment we need to know that we've found our self at the beginning of *our* spiritual path. This is Love calling us. This is Trinity loving us to the point that we're ready to transcend and transform from being catholic to being Catholic. This is the Beloved inviting us to "Come and follow me." It is an intensely intimate reaching, not out to us, but in to us. This is Amazing Grace.

The first thing to know is that this is a calling to a relationship. It is Trinity loving us. We have always been and always are loved and now we are ready to become aware of the exquisite simplicity of Love as our life. We exist because we are in relationship.

A "relationship" means we are not in charge. A relationship is between us. It's about us, not me. It's about us and Trinity and one another all swirling together as an expression of divine and creative love. We're in a much grander world than we've been able to imagine for ourself.

Our instinctive reaction will constantly be to reduce this universe, Trinity's Kingdom, back into the tiny world of our thoughts. We know this tiny world that we've created in our minds and we've found some comfort there. I catch myself creating this struggle over and over for myself. I want God, but on my terms. Even a tiny child will not settle for fitting into our world, they act instinctively to have it their way. And when I pay attention to what brought me to this point in my life I realize that I was not willing to fit into the small world offered by our culture and its brand of faith. Thank God – literally! But now it is time to let go of our tiny world so that we can live in Trinity's world.

Here we are on the precipice of a relationship – but now we're starting to realize that we've always be here. It's a precarious place for that part of us that wants to be in control. This is the reality of being a love child: "You are my beloved on whom my favor rests." To be "beloved" is to let ourselves live in relationship with infinite Love, love beyond our boundaries.

So we find ourselves in a relationship whether we're willing to commit or not. Sounds like a Hollywood movie. This path begins with the revelation of our love interest and swiftly introduces us to a paradox: we get in the way of following this path when we try too hard. "Trying" is a way of getting control but this is not something we can control. It's a relationship and every time we try to control it or make it happen we reduce it to ourself. This is the paradox of dealing with our ego.

Our ego is a series of thoughts, beliefs and memories that we think of as being us. They are far too small and rigid to contain us. In our ego there is only room for us and on our spiritual path we are being schooled in receiving love and sharing love, and making room for all of Trinity's creation.

Love loves us for all of who we are, our ego wants to reduce us and separate us into categories that make us feel special (in either a positive or negative way.) At one time in our life this helped us create a sense of our self. It is the platform of our self awareness. But now is the time to expand our awareness so that we can receive the intensity and abundance of Trinity loving us into existence. Trinity is tutoring us in Divine Love. We are made for it all and now we are being

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

taught to receive it all. I find that I do not go willingly although I also find that I am also drawn onward because nothing else feels real.

Don't let me make this too dramatic. It's about letting go and letting God be the center of our life. But it feels like we're taking baby steps, or just learning to walk. We keep falling down and sometimes we're happy to just sit on the ground, but something in us makes us get up over and over again.

Please don't let my words and metaphors bind you. You have your own unique experience of being in this place. You would do well in describing it for yourself and maybe sharing it with us. What I know is that I have no answer. I'm feeling my way through the spiritual path and there is no map – just Jesus pointing the “Way,” calling us to an ever deepening intimacy with Trinity.

My words are not the criteria to judge yourself – the point is your own experience. You have to walk this for yourself because it is in the walking that you become more fully aware. I promise you that I will follow the path with as much honesty and sensitivity as I can as well as much reluctance and backsliding as I need.

None of us follow the path straight ahead but it's up to you to follow your path as well as you are able and to learn that Trinity is with you no matter where you go. And hopefully somewhere along the way we'll be able to share our stories and learn together. It's in sharing our stories that Trinity expands our hearts to make more room for love and awareness.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

He judged himself by his intentions,
 his friends by their deeds,
 and his rivals by their mistakes. - David Brooks: The Social Animal p. 204

Along the spiritual path we begin to notice the inconsistencies in our judgments, in the difference between the way we judge ourselves as compared to others. Our self judgments are mostly self-serving in that they uphold our sense of self. If it's a positive sense of self our judgments serve our righteousness. If we have chosen a negative sense of self our judgments are self-condemning and even more condemning of others. How can this be when Love is our essence?

Those of us who grew up in the Catholic church have heard the explanation of this quandary described as “Original Sin.” The Catholic catechism says this:

“By his sin Adam, as the first man, lost the original holiness and justice he had received from God, not only for himself but for all humans. Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called "original sin". As a result of original sin, human nature is

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called "concupiscence").^[34]

The most important thing to understand here is that Original Sin is far more than an abstract doctrine. It is part of our shared human experience. We all experience an inability to live up to our best intentions. Understanding what is good and deciding to act on that good is not enough. Something drags us down. We call this Original Sin, but that doesn't give us much insight into what to do about it.

The common answer is that Jesus has saved us, but what does that mean in our experience. We are told to follow him and do his will but that still leaves us with the inability to do his will. This advice deals with the symptoms but doesn't give us much insight into their causes. It is basically a philosophical interpretation of scriptures. Even though philosophical concepts fit together logically that doesn't mean that the human experience fits as neatly into their constructs. This philosophy sees mind and will as the two basic functions that make humans distinct from instinctual animals. Mind is needed to see what is good and moral and will is needed to impose good values and goals on our actions.

Buddhists describe this common experience as being at cross purposes with our self. Part of us wants one thing and another part of us wants the opposite. They see this dividedness as a natural function of the way our mind and ego work. The solution is to loosen the power of our ego and tap into our deeper spiritual nature.

Modern psychology talks about the "unconscious." There is the realization that something is influencing us that we are not aware of let alone able to control. And it takes a great deal of psychological work to begin to get in touch with this "something." Even then we never uproot all the things that influence us.

Psychology offers the further insight that actions emerge from mind, will *and perception*. Our perceptions, the way our personality interprets situations, creates the basic background for our intellectual understanding and emotional reactions to the situation. Unless we train ourselves we are usually unaware of the way we perceive reality and therefore out of touch with the basic motivations that affect our actions.

Another very common approach is to recognize the addictive qualities of our human experience. Twelve Step programs deal with deadly addictions through recognizing our powerlessness over them, letting go, and letting God/Higher Power be our strength. They find support in meeting and learning from one another's experience as well as "working" the Twelve Steps.

As priests we spend time talking to and listening to people who are trying to live better lives or more loving relationships, and we see the struggle going on with something that takes us in directions we do not choose. We see the agony of this struggle. And when we're honest we know it in our self. This can lead us to compassion, forgiveness and trusting in God's mercy.

Some priests however react and become more aggressive believing that if we just try harder and pressure ourselves we'll do better. We were trained in the "mind and will" approach. I've found

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

in my life that this approach only creates rigidity, repression and a distorted vision. “Mind and will” only work for a brief moment. This approach is like one of those drug commercials that promises relief from some symptoms and then adds a list of possible negative side effects.

The “mind and will” approach emphasizes God’s judgment, justice, wrath and punishment as further incentives to our will. I believe, and many of my priestly brothers would agree, that this is a primitive approach that ends up binding well intentioned people more than freeing them. As far as I’m concerned a hard lined approach just adds the burdens of fear and guilt to the people who are so sincerely struggling with their life.

I certainly don’t have any simple solutions. I have spent most of my priestly life, using myself as a kind of guinea pig. The **Inner View** articles in this bulletin are my reflections on my own struggles. The first step for me was to change the basic metaphor by which I characterize this struggle and my relationship to Trinity. The metaphor that makes most sense to me is that of being “wounded” and in need of Trinity’s healing. I read the Gospels in this light looking for Jesus’ insight into our human predicament and the attitudes implicit in his vision of who we are in relationship to our Father, our inner self and one another. Humble gratitude, forgiveness (being forgiven and forgiving) interdependence (our nature mirroring the Trinity), love of the whole truth, inner vision, understanding our Source in Love and our need to be loving, are some of the basic leads that I try to follow. The dilemma I face over and over is how to find the source of these qualities within myself. They are Trinity’s gift but I tend to block them in my consciousness. This is why meditation has become important to my life.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

We are exploring the meaning of Original Sin. It is basically a metaphor trying to describe the reason we don’t live up to our best intentions and finest values. Unfortunately its use of the word “Sin” is misleading. A sin is a wrong that we freely choose to do. But “Original Sin” has nothing to do with our choice. That has always been a basic tenet of Catholic theology but it is quickly lost in the common understanding because it is attached to a need for God’s forgiveness. That’s why I think “wounding” is a more accurate metaphor. We are created out of divine Love but we become wounded somewhere along the line. The wounding is not something we choose. It is a dynamic of the way our personality unfolds and develops.

Becoming a person is the primary achievement of ego development. We begin as undifferentiated consciousness (we experience our self as a continuation of God’s love) and become a person through the development of our ego. This means that we develop into an individual with unique characteristics and skills, a human being able to relate to others as autonomous human beings with their own characteristics and skills. We need to become a person if we are to respond to God’s love with loving, to become a branch of the Vine (John 15:5).

In the beginning of our life, our consciousness is pure and open. Divine energies arise as they are needed. For instance, Divine Strength came when, as an infant, we needed food, and Divine Merging came when our needs were fulfilled in a satisfying way. Of course, we didn’t know or understand these experiences. Nor were they integrated into our conscious sense of self. They simply arose in a natural and spontaneous way because by our nature we were open to God’s

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

loving energy bringing us into existence.

These early experiences were greeted by our environment with a mix of support and nonsupport. Support allows the unfolding development and integration of our consciousness in a way that is open to Divine energies. Nonsupport, in the form of abandonment or punishment, or a simple lack of awareness constricts the energetic flow and arrests its development. Insults, hostility or wounds to our spirit cause pain, and the natural instinct is to close off to that pain.

This can occur when parents are out of touch with some aspect of their own being and get defensive when that aspect is present in us. The social environment in which we grow up can also be antagonistic to our spiritual depths. Because of this antagonism we get cut off from a part of our self and a hole develops in our awareness, we experience a lack of the divine energy that usually responds to the circumstances of our life.

The holes then become filled with the memory of the loss and the issues around the loss. After a while, we fill in the holes with false feelings, ideas, beliefs about our self, and strategies for dealing with our environment. These are "false" in the sense that they exist in our mind as replacements for the natural flow of divine energy. These fillers are collectively called the personality, ego, false self or for most of us "we." We identify with this as being our self.

We have created a structure, made up of memories, strategies for coping and surviving, all to compensate for our lost sense of connection with God. The movement toward this structure began as a need for becoming a person in response to God loving us into existence. But it was quickly curtailed by the limitations of our developing mind and rejection by our social environment. This blocks our consciousness of God loving us into existence and leaves a hole in our awareness of our self.

The ego attempts to defend against this hole by blocking it from awareness, filling it with a compensatory quality or behavior pattern. These compensations form important parts of our developing personality structure

We have come to think this is who we are. We think we are the fillers. And this means that our personality is trying to take the place of the real thing. This is why acting from our ego never satisfies our deepest longing and never creates an abiding sense of security, value and being loved. If you read the gospel accounts of Jesus' temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) you will see Jesus choosing his connection to God over the fillers proffered by Satan.

In our personal experience we begin to become aware of this hole when we realize that our desires are insatiable. Once we begin to become aware of the emptiness that can't be filled, no matter how much we are able to gather in our life, we begin to awaken to our need to reopen our channels to God. And this is what Jesus teaches us to do in the Gospels. He teaches us to become aware of our need and our helplessness because this opens our hearts to our Father.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

INNER VIEWS

In my experience most preachers, myself included, begin with a desire to preach long before anything real and worth saying has been authored within us. We begin by preaching someone else's message.

If we are honest with ourselves we soon find out that this message is somewhat empty, or at least not the literal message we believed will give our beliefs meaning. Hopefully this makes us begin to search out the deeper experiential reality that the message points us to.

Jesus began with John the Baptist's warning to repent and avoid God's wrath but soon learned it was too small to carry his experience. When he went to John to repent and be baptized he experienced a revelation that could not be contained in anything he had heard from John. The message was literally "out of the blue," and it became the message he proclaimed as the "Good News of salvation." The message was this: "You are my Beloved Son on whom my favor rests." (Mk. 1:11). He proclaimed it as our meaning and worked to awaken us to the intimacy of God's reality in our life.

Jesus was pretty clear about what he saw as his mission: "I have come to proclaim the good news." He gathered disciples around him and began to teach them but he also began to experience his Father's compassion and generosity working through him to heal the sick and drive out demons. And this attracted the crowds, far more than the message of being Beloved. They weren't ready for that; they preferred the gift to the Giver. They were brought up in a tradition that focused on the externals and had little desire to move inward toward God. And so Jesus would leave the crowds to go out and pray and get reoriented in the spaciousness of his Father's silence.

But Jesus also learned from the people he met and from their needs. Like all of us he had to be schooled in the mystery of our Father's love. At the wedding feast at Cana, when his mother told him about the couple's need he replied "Woman, why turn to me, my hour has not yet come." But she wasn't about to be put off; "Then she turned to the servants and told them, 'Do whatever he tells you.'" (John 2:6) He told them to fill six large jars with water. They did, and when they took the water to the steward it had become the wine they needed to continue the wedding feast. Evidently his Father's business was right here in responding to the needs of ordinary people and he needed his Mother to wake him up.

Like Jesus we gradually awaken to unconditional Love making itself present in the flesh and blood of our daily lives. We experience this divine outpouring of love as new insight, fresh energy, peaceful emotions, all of which create harmony, balance and wisdom in our living with each other. We experience these as shifts happening on a deeper level of our self, usually outside of our direct awareness. **B**ut we feel energy flowing in new ways, although we'd be hard pressed to know why. These shifts happen as a release of energy that takes place in our relationships with Jesus and one another.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Jesus tells us “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” These are not concepts to grasp or practices to engage but intimate relationships that mirror Jesus’ relationship to our Father and to us. Jesus is bringing us inward to our soul, our shared divine unity.

The spiritual growth that comes out of this relationship is not a matter of exchanging bad and negative qualities for good and positive qualities. It is a process of incorporating our loving energy, which arises from our soul, as the inclusive and expansive expression of our whole being. This happens by letting go of the rigidity and smallness of our ego and learning to live from our soul, the point of our being where Trinity is loving us into existence.

The original meaning of belief is to “give one’s heart to.” Our heart is the connection between our soul and its physical expression in our living. We can tell what we truly believe by what we hold close in our heart. For the most part we have been living out of a heart that has been shut down by rigid ideas. With Jesus’ encouragement we are growing into a supple, compassionate and generous heart whose perspective comes from the expansiveness of our soul, our connection to Trinity. This happens in relationship, in being loved and prompted to be loving. This is “the Way” of Jesus and this way is learned by wandering with Jesus. It is not an idea we take away from him but a connection we have with him.

You can see that this is far more than changing our ideas. For too long we’ve been deluded by the myth that having the correct ideas will make us faithful followers of Jesus. Jesus responded to people and loved them for who they were. He never tested their orthodoxy. The change he unleashes in us is our ability to love and forgive and be loved in relationship to ordinary people as we struggle with our lives. He teaches us to hold all creation, all of our self, and all of our sisters and brothers close to our heart. We learn to embrace our Father’s creation just as Trinity embraces us. Jesus calls the dynamic of this embracing and expansive love “the Kingdom of God.”

Our relationships become less centered on judging others and trying to force them into our agenda. Instead we become free to accept them for all of who they are. We know how we were and in accepting the Father’s love for us we are able to be present to another without illusion, as they are and as we really are, without pretension.

Jesus does not lead us to a destination; he uncovers the hidden richness that is our soul, our living experience of being loved into existence. Jesus does not teach us doctrines and dogmas, he untangles our beliefs about what will allow us to survive, what makes us happy and what truly satisfies us. He loosens the constrictions caused by our mind which get caught in judgments and expectations that bind us to narrow visions of our self and creates resistances to the breadth of God’s unconditional love.

When Jesus invites us to “follow me,” he is not inviting us to a destination. He is inviting us to wander with him and learn to relate to him in all the dimensions of our life. In our wandering we experience the incredible range and variety and creativity of our life. We find answers and then find that they are not big enough. We make connections and they evaporate to make room to embrace greater connections. We often feel lost or floundering and then we realize that we remain, we survive, and something more than we can understand is living us. There’s a Japanese

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

proverb that advises us: “Don’t study something. Get used to it.” This is how Jesus is awakening us.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

Wandering is a spiritual trait

Jesus wandered around much of his adult life. He learned from the people he met and in responding to the needs of the sick, the outcast and the spiritually hungry. It's not that he and God the Father wrote out a script beforehand and he simply acted it out. No, like all of us he learned through his wandering and from his prayerful experience of the Father's absolute and unconditional love.

Wandering is a playful way of learning and growing spiritually. It has to be playful so that it can remain open to the situation and not be constricted by our ego. Our ego will always try to repeat what we've done before. Wandering is a way of bringing our experience and understanding to a situation while remaining open to its complications, chaos and complexity.

Modern neurobiological research has laid down the biological and physical basis for wandering as a way of working with our whole mind. According to this research the human unconscious mind can take in 11 million bits of information at any moment. Our conscious mind, however, can only process 40 of these bits. The conscious mind creates stories to try to make sense out of these 40 bits. This leaves our unconscious mind to do the heavy lifting. Wandering is a way of letting the unconscious mind do its work, while keeping the conscious mind open to insights from the unconscious mind.

For hundreds of years now our Western culture has exalted the rational qualities of the conscious mind. And yet we all know from experience that people who believe they are being totally rational are affected by much more than the logic of the situation. And I'm sure we are aware of this in ourselves. However we've been taught that the way to grow and become better people is to use our rational minds, to learn and decide logically what is right and then use our wills to make ourselves act in accordance. I can tell you from years of dieting that this doesn't work, and now it is becoming evident why it doesn't work. We have in effect excluded most of our reality from the decision.

We end up fighting ourselves. And wandering is a way of reconnecting to our whole self. Here is David Brooks' assessment. This is from his recent book [The Social Animal](#).

“The unconscious parts of the mind are not primitive vestiges that need to be conquered in order to make wise decisions. They are not dark caverns of repressed sexual urges. Instead, the unconscious parts of the mind are most of the mind—where most of the decisions and many of the most impressive acts of thinking take place. These submerged processes are the seedbeds of accomplishment.”

Wandering is an attitude toward oneself that leaves room for the wisdom and insight of our

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

unconscious mind. We need the conscious mind to focus our energy, but we also need to be open to the breadth and experiential awareness of the unconscious mind. To wander is to be open to the uncertainty and complexity of life. We learn to restrain the impulse of our egoic rational mind to jump to oversimplified conclusions. John Keats describes this as the ability to be in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” This sounds like hersy to our rational egoic mind which is fixated on quick resolutions. It is wisdom to those who pay attention to the experience of their whole being. It is living in relationship to the Holy Spirit to those who have learned to trust Trinity’s active presence in their lives.

As wanders we learn to rely on patience to give our unconscious mind a chance to sort out the complexities of the world in which we are immersed. The more chaotic the scene, the more tolerant we learn to be. We need to humbly acknowledge both our ignorance and our helplessness in the face of its complications. We need to know that our ego mind would like to seize on the first bit of data it comes across and built a universal principle on it. We need to know that we come to every situation with stereotypes of how life works and then try to make the complexity conform to them.

Wisdom is a matter of acknowledging our limitations and remaining open to the sensations that come from within. We learn to make tentative generalizations and then allow ourselves time to let these marinate. We learn to play with these and imagine the possibilities until we have a deep sense of a temporary approach.

Again, let me quote from David Brooks:

“Meanwhile, Level 1(the unconscious) is churning away, blending data, probing for similarities and rhythms in its own ceaseless way. It is working up a feel for this new landscape: How does the light fall? How do the people greet one another? What is the pace of life? It's not only the individuals the unconscious is trying to discern, but the patterns between them.”

Next week I’d like to look at some ways to create a relationship with this deeper part of our lives. This is one of the basic talents that spirituality tries to help us develop. It was one of the traits the disciples learned from wandering with Jesus.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS Jesus’ Most Practical Advise

I sometimes watch “House Hunters International” on HGTV. Couples look for homes in areas that are far more primitive than what we’re used to here in the “States.” This difference is seen as charming and not as a reason for negative judgments. It would be great if we could learn to approach our own inner landscape with the same openness and acceptance.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

According to this Sunday's scriptures this openness and acceptance is exactly where Jesus is directing us. "Judge not" is his most direct way of saying it. Or to put it in more positive framework, "Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate."

I believe this is a pivotal attitude for the kind of life Jesus invites us into. Learning to live with fewer judgments connects us to the unconditional love of God the Father, as well as to our soul self.

Our soul self is that place where we are being loved into existence at every moment by Trinity. Since it is an expression of Trinity's loving in the unique personality of our humanness its basic quality is to be unconditionally open, nonjudgmental and loving. On this level of consciousness we experience the joy of being eternally alive, abundantly energized and compassionately related to all of Trinity's creation.

In the course of our personality development this joyful energy and exuberance is submerged beneath the concepts and judgments of our ego. Our ego uses anger, fear, analysis, abstract expectations and judgments to keep itself in the forefront of our consciousness. So "judge not" basically means that we need to loosen up our ego.

So what do we do about this? It's important to realize that we are taught to change ourselves by using judgments upon ourself. We are taught to read the scriptures as a judgment of what is wrong with us and an expectation to change ourself if we want to obey Jesus and gain God the Father's love. But this is not the consciousness that Jesus acts from and definitely not the way he wants us to approach ourselves. This is why he not only tells us "judge not" but he also tells us a parable.

A parable is meant to turn our ego's view of reality inside out. Jesus' parables want us to see ourselves through the eyes of our Father's unconditional love and abundance. A quick example might help make this more concrete.

Think of the parable of the Sower of Seeds. He goes out to sow seeds, some fall on rocky ground, others on weed infested ground and some few seeds on fertile ground. The seeds on rocky ground sprout but quickly wilt, but the seeds on fertile ground sprouts up and grows.

Now there are two ways to interpret this. From the ego point of view, the way we hear it most often interpreted is that the different types of ground represent different ways of responding to the word of God. According to this ego centered approach some of us respond but quickly wilt, just like the rocky ground. And some of us are like the good soil and the word of God grows in us. That's an ego interpretation. It sees itself as the center of all that is being said and sees this as a warning that will get it to react in a correct manner.

But there is also a soul centered approach. This approach understands the method of the parable and sees God as the center of all reality and the life giving source of our life. No farmer would just sow seed. It was far too precious. But God approaches us from abundance and generosity. And God loves us in our human reality. God knows that some of the seed will find fertile soil in

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

us and that is all that is needed. It is certainly far more realistic and loving than the ego centered approach.

This soul centered approach also parallels the reality of our consciousness. We take in incredible amounts of information but can consciously process only a small amount. The rest is processed in our unconscious. We can learn to access this information and use it far more wisely than the small amount that we originally worked with. That's what I was trying to describe in last weeks Inner Views. We connect to the vast amount and wisdom of unconscious information by learning to express what is going on within us without judgments and censoring.

Again, this puts Jesus' "judge not" in a larger context. We need to learn to approach ourselves and others without judging so that we can come closer to the whole truth of our situation. Whenever we judge another person or situation the best we can hope for is an understanding of our projections. We're reading ourselves into them. We think we're looking through a window when we're actually looking into a mirror. Our judgment is actually a self-judgment. As Jesus said "Judge not lest you be judged."

A great deal of our judgments are based on projections of our self. This comes from a literal approach to reality. To be "literal" means that we believe that what we see is exactly what is and that everybody sees exactly the same thing. The truth is that what we see is always filtered through our point of view and colored by our way of seeing. We don't see things exactly as they are. And this means that our judgments are based far more on our own reality than they are on the person we are judging.

Understanding the nature of judgments has made a big difference in my life. I still judge other people more than I would like. But this recognition that judgments reflect my inner reality more than they give me insight into that of others has helped me to place my trust in God's grace and loosen the demands of my ego. With that loosening comes a freer flow of energy and compassion and fairness. It makes room for other people as they are and allows me to trust God's agenda. It has also helped me move from a literal approach to other people and to the scriptures and opened me to a more metaphorical understanding of the meaning and purpose of my life. But more about that next week.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

What I'm learning while being sick.

At this time in my life I'm going through dialysis three times a week and I greatly appreciate your prayers. As you can imagine this has had an impact on the way I live my life and even more important how I create a sense of who I am. My consideration here, however, is to reflect on how this has impacted my spirituality, my way of relating to my life as a relationship with God.

Right now I'm the happiest I've been in years. I've certainly had many happy moments in my life but this is different. My head is a little clearer, my emotions are more stable, and I savor my life, my friends, community, acquaintances, as well as sunny days and warm weather, the simple

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

ordinary things that I've taken for granted for so long. For me this is the essence of what is happening. I'm aware of an energy in my life that is greater than anything I can produce for myself. And I think that much of it is the result of spiritual seeking, skill development, loving people and the necessity of letting go that decreased health demands.

Letting go is one of the things that sickness can do for us. We no longer have the energy to inflict our agenda on ourselves and others and if we're paying attention we lose the inclination to control our life as rigidly as we once did. We realize how much we rely on one another and on God's abundant love. This is a humbling experience that blossoms into gratitude and vulnerability.

I feel like a simpler person. I'm directed less by my ideas of who I am and should be and more by the energy given to me. I've lost a lot of activities that I've depended on for my self worth. These activities were a boost to my pride, to the way my ego creates an exaggerated sense of who I must be to be cared for. As my pride fades I've discovered that people still care. But now I know that it's their gift, their goodness and I'm incredibly grateful. And this in turn helps dissipate my pride. It's not about me, it's about the generous graciousness of many good people.

But to wake up to this I had to wake up to my demands and expectations about God. And then I let go, because they had nothing to do with who God is in my life. Yet in letting go I've received so much more. And my life flows more freely. This doesn't necessarily mean that I'm comfortable with God and don't still wish for miracles, but I trust God will help me deal with whatever is possible in my situation.

Last week I left you with this quote from Rabbi Rami Shapiro. I repeat it because it describes what I'm talking about::

Meditation is about melting the ice cube of ego into the ocean of reality.

Doing so decreases conflict and increases compassion.

If you are becoming more kind and helpful your meditation is working even if you never experience the purple haze of mystical distraction.

What I'm learning from my experience is that my soul self is intrinsic to me. That means it is not created by other people or external things and it is far more than the ideas in my mind. It is the living energy of God loving me into existence as the unique person I am.

Meditation (specifically for me, Centering Prayer) has had a great impact on making this awareness of myself an experienced gift. Jesus' advise to "Judge not" has helped me develop an attitude of gentleness and acceptance that tames my ego and its pride. Journal keeping gives me practice in relating to my inner reality with God's non-judgmental awareness. And simple creative expressions connect me to the intuition of my soul self.

Like many of you I started my spiritual seeking because I felt out of place and unsure that I belong. I felt isolated and left to my own devices and nothing satisfied me for very long. I had a deep seated desire for something that would give my life purpose, value and meaning. My faith tells me that God fulfills this in my life. I started by developing ideas about my relationships to

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

God and about how I should be relating. But this never satisfied me; it felt as if something essential was missing. And it took me years to realize that the missing quality in my relationship is blocked by relying on thoughts and ideas about God. I was relating to thoughts but these are not God. A real relationships needs vulnerability, letting go of my ego and its ideas and opening to the mysterious gift of God's love.

Innocence, gratitude, humility, openness are all qualities of our soul self and they come into our self awareness as we make room by letting go of our pride.. Our soul's voice is much softer than the strident oppression of our ego. Much of our spiritual development has to do with learning to sift out the simple soul self from the spectacle of our ego. We know our soul self mostly from the shifts of energy in our life. When we feel peaceful, creative and energized we know we're connecting to our soul self. When we feel strident, defensive or offensive we know we're being seduced by our ego.

Our ego maintains its dominance through pride. and pride gets its power from being half true. Pride identifies a few qualities as being "me.": "I'm this kind of person," and "I have these qualities that make me special, give me a right to impose my way of life and point of view." Humility, on the other hand, knows that God, not my special qualities, is the Source of my life. Humility helps me to love all of myself, my human limitations and needs as well as my creativity and ability to love. Humility lets God and God's judgments be the center and Source of my life.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

Go with your bliss.
Do your own thing.
Love yourself.
Listen to your heart.

Good advice, but how do I do these things? What is my bliss if I've never felt blissful? I've tried lots of things to make me happy and they are nice but temporary. How do I do my own thing? Do I even own a thing? Is there something that is uniquely mine to do? I've done so many things, I've worked hard so what more can I do? How do I love myself? By trying harder to be good? And how do I hear my heart when all this chatter is going on all around me and in my head?

In grade school I remember Sister Damien telling us to listen to the voice of conscience deep within us. And I didn't have a clue about what she meant. I knew that I had inner urges but sometimes they got me in trouble. Cartoons often depict a devil in red speaking to us on one of our shoulders and an angel in white speaking on the other shoulder. But I still am not clear about how to tell which voice is the devil and which one is an angel. It seems like the interesting voice is usually the devil.

When we begin to turn inward and pay attention we can be overwhelmed by all the chatter going on within us. The loudest, most dominant voice is that of our ego. It creates a racket and

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

constantly changes our focus, jumping from thoughts to emotions to imaginary scenarios that it creates in reaction to what is going on in and around us. its afraid of being ignored if we begin to pay attention to the quiet intuition of our soul self.

As a reaction to the wounds that happened in our life the ego struggles to keep painful, shameful and unacceptable memories out of our awareness. Its part of our survival instinct that fearfully reacts with anger, pride, rage, lust, greed, procrastination, jealousy and defensiveness. Our soul self, which is an expression of God's love creating us at this moment, has no need to be defensive. Our soul self feels confident and peaceful.

Our ego is driven by fear and so it reacts by stirring up painful emotions. Remember, emotions are different than feelings. Feelings are physical rations to a situation while emotions are mental interpretations that stir up reactions. Emotions add a story that interprets the situation, usually in catastrophic images.

Emotions will urge us to act now, quickly, before there's a total catastrophe or to control the situation before it takes you over. Emotions tend to have a quality of harsh self-judgment. They will tell you, "You can't do this. You haven't got what it takes!" "Don't kid yourself, you're going to be overcome. You've got to act now." "Either fight it and run from it.!"

Our soul self, in contrast, inspires no such drama or panic. It encourages us to slow down, to be aware and pay attention to the whole situation. Our soul self encourages us to listen to our inner wisdom, the Spirit working within us. "You can be patient and act when you're ready." Our soul self begins with compassion, trusting in our creativity and God's grace while also accepting our limitations.

The good news is that we can learn to recognize the voice of our ego, its quality, catchphrases, and favorite sayings. We can't and shouldn't try to rid ourselves of our ego but we can tame it by being aware of it, accepting it for what it is and not being fooled by it. At the same time we can learn to let our soul self speak more clearly by learning some simple journal methods (contact me at KCSsR@aol.com and I'll send some to you) and meditation.

There are nine basic ways our ego can create our way of relating to our life. These are reactions to a feeling of lost connection with God. This happens as we develop a sense of our separate self by separating ourselves from God. It's a necessary step in our lives but the fear that is born of this illusion of separation gives our ego its power over our awareness. This is why learning to gently and compassionately accept ourselves is a necessary first step in relating to our true self.

Learning to accept ourselves as we are is the beginning of treating ourselves with the unconditional love that God is for us. This non-judgmental acceptance begins to open the gates of God's love and reestablishes our sense of connection.. Once we've reestablished this connection we will be able to recognize our basic pride.

This pride is the way our ego establishes our sense of self. We choose an actual quality of our personality and then use it to either inflate or deflate our sense of self. The quality is true but it is

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

only half of our truth. When we use it to *inflate* our self we are telling ourselves that this is what makes us valuable and worthy of setting the agenda for our life.

When we use it to *deflate* our self we are basically saying “I’m powerless, poor me” and “the rest of you need to take care of me the way I want you to.” Both inflating and deflating our sense of self is a way of trying to pressure others to do what we want. They give us an illusory sense of being in control of our life. But they also blind us to the limitations of our self and bind us into a pattern of repeating the same reactions believing that they have different consequences.

Pride often carries a negative connotation in religious circles. We would do far better spiritually if we learn to accept the reality of our pride without judging ourselves. It is just the way our mind works and being aware of its limitations gives us a humble sense of our whole reality. And besides I’ve often thought that it was good to understand my pride because everyone else sees it and I don’t want to be the only one left out.

Next week I’ll describe the nine basic patterns our pride can take.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

You should be proud of yourself.
Pride comes before the fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

So, what advise should we follow? Actually this is one of those rare times when we can have our cake and eat it too. Pride feeds us but pride also goes straight to our hips. Prides has a legitimate place in our lives and it can also be hurtful.

Our personal qualities and gifts are also our problems. Our strengths are also our weaknesses. Each of us has a dominant quality of divine energy and love that drives us in everything we do. It is the source of our achievements but when we use it too much it is our chief fault.

When, as children we enter this world, our awareness is very fluid and we are unconsciously aware of our connection to the divine and loving energy that is creating us. it is the development of our unique personality that makes possible our conscious perception of this connection. At the same time, because of the way our mind works, we develop rigid structures (habit, beliefs, tensions, identifications, self images, judgments etc.) the blind us to this connection. This is why spiritual growth is so ambiguous and seemingly contradictory. We are know that it is not enough to have good intentions and we spend much of our lives muddling around trying to be the person we want to be. Yet, it’s the image and expectations of who we want to be, that blocks our growth.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Here are the nine basic sources of pride which describe its gifts and promise as well as its fixations and blinding self delusions. When we begin to understand the one that dominates our consciousness we will begin to release and experience the freedom that spirituality promises>

1. The Pride of Perfection is tied to the image of “I am right. I am hardworking.” As our consciousness develops and we lose our sense of connection to divine presence we lose our awareness of being good. And this leads us to the trap of trying to gain worthiness by being correct. With this we lose our awareness that our life, as well as that of all others, is divine and good just as it is. We buy into a delusion that some things are perfect and others are not.

In reaction we work at and often develop a rational, principled and self-controlled approach to our life. In our desire to reclaim the goodness we become industrious and highly responsible. But this often comes across as being demanding, judgmental and rigid.

So this pride brings the gift of a desire for integrity and commitment to perfection and dedication to structures. But hidden behind this face are compulsive and demanding standards which judge everyone and everything as deficient.

2. The Pride of Helpfulness and Manipulation is tied to the image of “I’m helpful.” This person enters a room with the thought “These people need me to help them.” This self image is a reaction to a feeling of not being wanted. And this traps them in the impossible attempt to obtain personal fulfillment through meeting other people’s needs.

Their specific experience of loss of connection to divine Love leads them to forget that there is a greater power at work in this universe than themselves. This is experienced as a humiliating and shameful blow to their self-worth. They delude themselves with the feeling that they must get things to go their way, according to their will.

These people are caring, generous and possessive. They can be very generous, sensitive, helpful and energetic but hidden behind this is a tendency to be manipulative and interfering.

3. The Pride of Achievement is tied to the image of “I’m successful,” which is built on the false assumption that we get love by what we achieve rather than who we are. This seduces them into the trap that being super efficient will assure them success, love, recognition and acceptance. They’ve lost connection with the unconditional quality of divine love, which leads to the delusion that they are separate, unsupported and must act on their own to get what they need.

These people are gifted with the ability to get things done. To do this efficiently they become very sensitive to the situation, highly attuned to people’s reactions. They are driven to succeed and very often strong, competent leaders. But hidden in this drive to succeed is a hollowness that comes from being directed outward and spend little time developing their own unique values.

4. The Pride of Specialness is built on the self image that “I am special, sensitive, highly unique in my standards of excellence.” These people have denied their feelings of separation from divine Presence and try to hold onto it by demanding excellence and specialness for themselves. They are trying to avoid their deep sense of being estranged by holding onto a self created

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

specialness. They are trapped into trying to obtain the specialness of being loved instead of receiving love as a gift.

These people are gifted with an artistic sensitivity. They tend to be highly intuitive, empathetic, creative and passionate. But this often leaves them melancholic and feeling flat. They are very much aware of what they don't have and are negative about what they do have and what is available to them. It just doesn't meet their special standards. They grieve lost possibilities.

5. The Pride of Knowing is built on the self image "I'm perceptive and I strive harder to really know!" As a child this person has bought into the belief that there just is not enough knowledge or enough resources to meet everyone's needs. This becomes a conviction that they must create themselves through knowing what is true, and this leaves them feeling deficient, small, isolated, alone, cut off from others and inadequate. They become trapped into trying to become so self sufficient that they will not need anyone else.

These people will minimize their personal needs as a way of avoiding involvement. Their gifts and strengths develop in response to this. They become perceptive, innovative, although somewhat detached. They are able to live with simple needs, keep other's confidence, be calm in tense situations and bring a great deal of knowledge to whatever they are interested in, however they come across as withdrawn, unemotional, and out of touch with the concrete realities of living.

6. The Pride of Loyalty. These people describe themselves as being both "loyal and Cautious." As children they lost a sense of being safe because they are motivated primarily by selfishness. They don't trust others to be good or sincere and they believe they cannot trust reality/ divine Presence to be supportive. This traps them into seeking security while never trusting anything or anyone to be secure enough.

They become very vigilant, always questioning and doubting, scanning for what can go wrong. Because of this they look for someone or some institution that they can trust. And when they choose one they are extremely loyal. They become highly engaged in whatever or whoever it is and dedicate themselves to it while being highly suspicious and even hostile to those who do not share the same loyalty.

7. The Pride of Easy Going Optimism. These people would describe themselves as being "fun loving, seeing the bright side of life, and easy going." They get lost in fantasies about the future as a way of avoiding the pain of their lost sense of divine Presence. They make up for the loss by planning for themselves instead of paying attention to what truly is. Their hope is that keeping an idealized, positive attitude, will allow them to avoid suffering.

All of this develops within them an ability to find pleasure and make things happen. They are playful, inventive, optimistic, accomplished and impulsive. This also limits their ability to be present to what is actually happening and to be fully committed.

8. The Pride of Self-defined Justice. The basic attitude here is "I can do it. I am powerful. I will protect the underdog." And in the name of justice these types are willing to bowl over

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

anyone who gets in their path. Their world view reduces everything into sets of opposites against which they must enforce justice upon anything that is not theirs. They live in opposition to the rest of the world. And they take pride in being powerful, even invulnerable.

Yet they are surprised that their pushing creates a push back, their vengeance leads to retaliation, because in their mind they are just doing the good and righteous thing. In their quest they come across as self-confident, decisive, courageous, energetic and intensely fair. Yet hidden behind this front is a domineering energy to which people inevitably react.

9. The Pride of being a Peacemaker. These people describe themselves as “Easygoing, and easy to get along with.” It seems illogical but their attitude comes from a lost awareness of the unconditional quality of divine Love. For them love is conditional, restricted to certain times and places, but not something we can count on. They are left with a feeling of being unlovable, devoid of anything that is wonderful, beautiful, or valuable. In reaction they fluctuate between blending in to get along and being defiantly resistant and independent. This traps them into looking outside of themselves for comfort and peace.

To compensate for all of this they learn to be receptive, affirming and compliant. Because they are understanding, caring and adaptive to others they can be excellent mediators. Hidden within this is an avoidance of conflict and denial of their own anger. They tend to numb themselves in order to remain “peaceful.”

Reduced version for the bulletin

INNER VIEWS

You should be proud of yourself –or-Pride comes before the fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

Our personal qualities and gifts are also our problems. Our strengths are also our weaknesses. Each of us has a dominant quality of divine energy and love that drives us in everything we do. It is the source of our achievements but when we use it too much it is our chief fault.

Here are the nine basic sources of pride which describe its gifts and promise as well as its fixations and blinding self delusions. When we begin to understand the one that dominates our consciousness we will begin to release and experience the freedom that spirituality promises>

1. The Pride of Perfection is tied to the image of “I am right. I am hardworking.” As our consciousness develops and we lose our sense of connection to divine presence we lose our awareness of being good. And this leads us to the trap of trying to gain worthiness by being correct. With this we lose our awareness that our life, as well as that of all others, is divine and good just as it is. We buy into a delusion that some things are perfect and others are not. In reaction we work at and often develop a rational, principled and self-controlled approach to our life. In our desire to reclaim the goodness we become industrious and highly responsible. But this often comes across as being demanding, judgmental and rigid. So this pride brings the gift of a desire for integrity and commitment to perfection and dedication to structures. But hidden behind this face are compulsive and demanding standards which judge everyone and everything as deficient.

2. The Pride of Helpfulness and Manipulation is tied to the image of “I’m helpful.” This person enters a room with the thought “These people need me to help them.” This self image is a reaction to a feeling of not being wanted. And this traps them in the impossible attempt to obtain personal fulfillment through meeting other people’s needs.

Their specific experience of loss of connection to divine Love leads them to forget that there is a greater power at work in this universe than themselves. This is experienced as a humiliating and shameful blow to their self-worth. They delude themselves with the feeling that they must get things to go their way, according to their will. These people are caring, generous and possessive. They can also be sensitive, helpful and energetic but hidden behind this is a tendency to be manipulative and interfering.

3. The Pride of Achievement is tied to the image of “I’m successful,” which is built on the false assumption that we get love by what we achieve rather than who we are. This seduces them into the trap that being super efficient will assure them success, love, recognition and acceptance.

They’ve lost connection with the unconditional quality of divine love, which leads to the delusion that they are separate, unsupported and must act on their own to get what they need. These people are gifted with the ability to get things done. To do this efficiently they become very sensitive to the situation, highly attuned to people’s reactions. They are driven to succeed and very often strong, competent leaders. But hidden in this drive to succeed is a hollowness that comes from being directed out ward and spending little time developing their own unique values.

4. The Pride of Specialness is built on the self image that “I am special, sensitive, highly unique in my standards of excellence.” These people have denied their feelings of separation from divine Presence and try to hold onto it by demanding excellence and specialness for themselves. They are trying to avoid their deep sense of being estranged by holding onto a self created specialness. This traps them into trying to obtain the specialness of being loved instead of receiving love as a gift. These people are gifted with an artistic sensitivity. They tend to be highly intuitive, empathetic, creative and passionate. But this often leaves them melancholic and feeling flat. They are very much aware of what they don’t have and are negative about what they do have and what is available to them. It just doesn’t meet their special standards. They grieve lost possibilities.

5. The Pride of Knowing is built on the self image “I’m perceptive and I strive harder to really understand!” As a child this person has bought into the belief that there just is not enough knowledge or enough resources to meet everyone’s needs. This becomes a conviction that they must create themselves through knowing what is true. And this leaves them feeling deficient, small, isolated, alone, cut off from others and inadequate. They become trapped into try to use knowledge to make them so self sufficient that they will not need anyone else. These people will minimize their personal needs as a way of avoiding involvement. Their gifts and strengths develop in response to this. They become perceptive, innovative, although somewhat detached. They are able to live with simple needs, keep other’s confidence, be calm in chaotic or tense situations and bring a great deal of knowledge to whatever they are interested in. However they can come across as withdrawn, unemotional, and out of touch with the concrete realities of living.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

6. The Pride of Loyalty. These people describe themselves as being both “Loyal and Cautious.” As children they lost a sense of being safe because the experience others as motivated primarily by selfishness. They don’t trust others to be good or sincere and they believe they cannot trust reality/ divine Presence to be supportive. This traps them into seeking security while never trusting anything or anyone to be faithful enough. They become very vigilant, always questioning and doubting, scanning for what can go wrong. Because of this they look for someone or some institution that they can trust. And when they choose one they are extremely loyal. They become highly engaged in whatever or whoever it is and dedicate themselves to it while being highly suspicious and even hostile to those who do not share the same loyalty.

7. The Pride of Easy Going Optimism. These people would describe themselves as being “fun loving, seeing the bright side of life, and easy going.” They get lost in fantasies about the future as a way of avoiding the pain of their lost sense of divine Presence. They make up for the loss by planning for themselves instead of paying attention to what truly is. Their hope is that keeping an idealized, positive attitude, will allow them to avoid suffering. All of this develops within them an ability to find pleasure and make things happen. They are playful, inventive, optimistic, accomplished and impulsive. But this limits their ability to be present to what is actually happening and to be fully committed.

8. The Pride of Self-defined Justice. The basic attitude here is “I can do it. I am powerful. I will provide justice.” And in the name of justice these types are willing to bowl over anyone who gets in their path. Their world view reduces everything into sets of opposites against which they must enforce justice upon anything that is not theirs. They live in opposition to the rest of the world. And they take pride in being powerful, even invulnerable. Yet they are surprised that their pushing creates a push back, their vengeance leads to retaliation, because in their mind they are just doing the good and righteous thing. In their quest they came across as self-confident, decisive, courageous, energetic and intensely fair. Yet hidden behind this front is a domineering energy to which people inevitably react.

9. The Pride of being a Peacemaker. These people describe themselves as “Easygoing, and easy to get along with.” It seems illogical but their attitude comes from a lost awareness of the unconditional quality of divine Love. For them love is conditional, restricted to certain times and places, but not something we can count on. They are left with a feeling of being unlovable, devoid of anything that is wonderful, beautiful, or valuable. In reaction they fluctuate between blending in to get along and being defiantly resistant and independent. This traps them into looking outside of themselves for comfort and peace. To compensate for all of this they learn to be receptive, affirming and compliant. Because they are understanding, caring and adaptive to others they can be excellent mediators. Hidden within this is an avoidance of conflict and denial of their own anger. They tend to numb themselves in order to remain “peaceful.”

“A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Mt. 12:25)

Last week’s reflection on the nine sources of pride contains within it the basic paradox of spiritual growth. Pride basically means that our ego is built on the shame, fear or anger that we feel in response to being cut off from our awareness of God’s love as the life giving source of

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

our life. In reaction to this we create our pride, our attempt to regain that love through our own efforts.

In this effort we do develop positive qualities but these are motivated by shame, fear or anger and are conditional. They are reactionary and become rigid, a one-sided development of this quality. The way out of this mess is to reclaim our true foundation in God's love as the unconditional source of our living. But the difficulty in doing this happens because our attempts to reclaim God's love, when sponsored by our ego, is really an attempt to win love by our own efforts instead of receiving it as a gift.

Today I'd like to revisit the nine types of pride and describe the necessary process of re-orienting our personality. This is called "repentance" in classical religious language. It means "to turn around and see in a new light." It is a re-orienting and restructuring of our self-awareness that Jesus calls "salvation." It is also counter-intuitive. It reverses the thinking that got us to this point in the first place.

This is why spiritual growth seems so difficult and mysterious. Our ego is built on an attempt to find value, security and love and this is why it is so hard to let go of it. We experience our ego as the source of our survival. As Jesus said "You have to give up your life to save it." We are being asked to let go of that part of our self which we created to save ourselves. But for Jesus we let go so that we can receive the gift of divine Love.

1. Reorienting the Pride of Needing to be Perfect. Here we have chosen to claim our rightful place in the world by demanding perfection of our self and others. Our true nature is to be wise and discerning. Although our ego, which works in half-truths, casts all reality in either / or terms, good and bad, the truth is there is more than one way to be right and goodness is bigger than our ideas about good and bad. We need to learn compassion and the sense of perfection in all things and everyone, which includes accepting differences, mistakes, natural desires and the shadow as necessary components of our humanness. We have to learn that others have something to offer and that we can learn from them. We need to reconnect to the essential goodness of all that is created by God.

2. Reorienting the Pride of Being Helpful. Here we must relearn that we are loved and cherished for who we are and let go of our claim on love by fulfilling others' needs. Our true nature is to nurture ourselves and others, to be good to ourselves and have goodwill and compassion for others. We have to learn that giving to others does not bring freedom and fulfillment but instead cuts us off from awareness of our own needs – especially our need to do for others. We must learn to nurture our self as separate from what we do for others. And this begins with paying attention to our personal needs as well as recognizing that others might be able to get along without our interference. We reconnect to divine Love when we are able to trust God be able to take care of creation.

3. Reorienting the Pride of Being an Achiever. Here again we must learn that we are loved for ourselves and not merely for what we achieve. Our true nature is to take joy in our existence and to esteem and value others. We must pay attention to the reality that outer success does not bring inner fulfillment or the feeling of true well-being. To do this we must learn to moderate our

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

efforts, welcome all of our feelings, understand that failure is not a disaster, and realize that love is for us, not what we accomplish. Maybe people will accept me the way I am. And maybe their opinions are not as important as I make them out to be.

4. Reorienting the Pride of Being Special. Here we learn that people see through our specialness and love us for all of who we are. This allows us to be forgiving and let go of the past so that we can appreciate what se here and now and accept ourself as well as others for who we are, without demanding speicalness. We will learn to give up our focus on the negative and accept the ordinary for it goodness. Even though our feelings will continue to be intense and fluctuate we will know that we are more than our feelings. Maybe others do know me, support and understand me. And maybe I'm not the only one who feels this way. And I find that down deep I am connected to everything.

5. Reorienting the Pride of Knowing. Here our pride is deflated when we realize that our needs are not a problem – we can be needy and loved at the same time. In doing this we learn to accept ourself and others without judgment and expectations. We find that our true nature is to be engaged with reality, contemplating the wonders of this world. This allows us to reconnect to heart felt feelings and experience the energy of God's love giving us all the energy and resources we need. To sustain this we learn to allow more people into our protective circle, share our selves more fully and engage in physical activity.

6. Reorienting the Pride of Being Loyal. Here our pride is deflated when we realize that trying to get certainty just creates more uncertainty and anxiety. We learn that we are safe because we have learned to have faith in ourself and trust the goodness of life. We grow into our true nature which is courageous and capable of dealing with life under all circumstances.

7. Reorienting the Pride of Easy Going Optimism. Here we let go of our idealization of life and avoidance of suffering. In doing this we learn that we are taken care of, we are freed to enjoy and celebrate existence and share the richness of our experience with everyone. We reclaim and accept life in the present moment: pain and fear, and limits as well as pleasure, joy and emotions. We realize that what we already have is enough and so we can simply be here.

8. Reorienting the Pride of Being Just. Here we learn to reclaim the ability to approach each situation without the need to overpower it. We come to accept that others will not always betray us and that we accept the possibility that truth exists in them as well as ourself. We give up our need to be invulnerable by protecting our self and we reawaken to the awareness that everyone exists in innocence.

9. Reorienting the Pride of Being a Peacemaker. Here we stop looking outside of our self for comfort and harmony. We realize that peace and healing come from within. Our true nature is to be an inexhaustible font of serenity, acceptance and kindness. We reclaim unconditional love for ourself and a sense of our importance as being equal to all others.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual development begins in earnest when we realize that uneasiness and unhappiness in our life is caused by something going on within us. We begin to see that our discomfort is not entirely the fault of someone or something outside of us. This is when we begin to turn inward and become self-reflective.

This self-reflection is exciting at first. It gives us insight and helps make sense out of our life experiences. We dig deep within and find experiences in our past that strongly influence our present experience of our life. This is a relief, there is a reason for our behavior, and we have hope that our life can be better. But it soon becomes frustrating because something within us is resisting our best attempts at improving our situation. An insight of spirituality is that our best qualities are also our resistances. This is basically the point of our reflections on Pride.

To be “Proud” is to say “This is what makes me who I am.” “I am easy to get along with;” “I seek perfection;” “I work hard at knowing and understanding;” “I am helpful;” The problem with all of these is not that they are false, but that they are only partially true, they are not our whole truth, our whole reality. They have become qualities we hold onto so that we can avoid the deeper pain of feeling disconnected from God (in biblical terms, “thrown out of the Garden of Eden

When we try to replace God we create an emptiness, a vacuum that is soon flooded by anger, shame or fear. Each one of us tends to be driven by one of these three negative energies. And since they are painful we develop a way of avoiding them. This is our Pride.

We are like a boxer dancing around the ring, bobbing and weaving, trying to duck our present reality. When anger is our dominant feeling, we feel overwhelmed by reality and try to avoid this feeling by aggressively attacking life, or passively withdrawing from life, or putting our hope into imposing perfection on this world.

When shame is our dominant reality we are basically convinced that we are worthless and unlovable. Our reaction is to avoid this by being helpful, successful, or special. If fear is our basic reaction to life we feel that deep down there is nothing to support our life and no wisdom by which to guide our life. And we try to avoid these reactions by being knowledgeable, loyal or by keeping a positive outlook on life. Anger, shame and fear are so much a part of our life that we don’t pay much attention – until we turn inward and begin to listen to our life.

Now here’s the insight embedded in all of this. We have been taught to attack ourselves, to work at making ourselves better. This is the ego centric approach to life. But all it does is reinforce the attitude that is causing our pain. It tries to use the very thing that disconnects us from God as the path back to God.

If we recognize that anger drives our life the first recourse we have to dealing with it is to avoid our anger through attacking ourselves, avoiding ourselves or trying to perfect ourselves. In any case we are turning our anger on our self and reinforcing our anger – which makes us feel even more disconnected from God as our source.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

If we come to feel the shame that drives our life we will try to shame ourselves into being better. We will work even harder at taking care of people as a way of avoiding the pain of our shame. We will try to be even more successful so that we don't have to feel worthless. Or we will try to be better by longing for someone or something to make us special.

If we come to know ourself as driven by fear we will continue to avoid the pain of fear by trying to understand and know more about our situation. Or we be even more loyal and grit our teeth and suffer through our life. Or we will simply avoid it by trying to keep a positive attitude. In any case we will be no different than when we started.

There is a way out. It is a very simple way of being present to our life which loosens the knot of our pride. If we are driven by anger (**types 8,9, 1**) here is a gentle way of being present that will gradually diffuse the grip of anger over your personality.

Being Present to the Body: At this moment, as you are reading the words on this page, can you feel your body? How much of it? Where is your body positioned right now? How deeply are you experiencing it? What helps you experience it more deeply?

If shame is driving our avoidance of ourself (**types 2,3,4**) we can try this meditation as a way of treating ourself with more respect and acceptance. This will open the door to God's respect and acceptance as the Source of our living.

Being Present in the Feeling Center Right now as you are reading these words on this page, turn your attention to the area of your heart. Take some deep, easy breaths, and actually sense into your chest. What sensations do you experience in this area? Allow yourself to relax and breathe deeply and see what you are feeling in the area of your heart. does it feel sharp? Tender? Numb? Aching? What is the exact feeling you are experiencing? If this feeling had a color or shape or taste, what would it be? What effect does this exercise have on your sense of yourself?

When fear is the motivation that drives much of what we do (**types 5,6,7**) here is a way of being in the present, where there is no fear:

The Thinking Center: Right now allow yourself to relax and get in greater contact with the sensations and impressions you are having. Actually sense what it feels like to be in your body at this time. Don't visualize – let yourself experience whatever is here. As you become more grounded and calm you may begin to notice your mind becoming less "noisy". Continue this process for a few minutes. Stay in contact with your immediate sensations and impressions, and see what effect this has on your thinking. As your mind becomes quieter, are your perceptions clearer or fuzzier? Does your mind seem sharper or duller?

These meditation methods are not magic pills. It has taken your whole life to get to the point where you are and it will take a great deal of patience in using these methods to help untangle your life. But this is by far the most effective way I know of moving beyond our pride and into our wholeness and freedom as God's beloved children.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

7 Tools for Spiritual Growth

We develop spiritually as we get in touch with our true nature, our soul self, the experience of being a living expression of Trinity's unconditional love. For Jesus this began with his baptism and the voice from heaven, "You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." This voice is meant for us too, but we'll have to peel away the layers of defenses and identifications with ideas about ourselves before we can experience this as our reality. Here are seven qualities that will help us focus more fully on awakening to Trinity's love in our living.

1. Seeking Truth

Unless we really learn to pay attention, give our heart and soul to the truth, the best we can do is repeat our opinions. For many their point of view is enough. But if we want to know Trinity's unconditional love, if we want to respond with love, we need to develop our capacity for "the whole truth." This is why Jesus invites us into a relationship with our Father. A relationship is an experience that is bigger than facts and information and beliefs. A relationship is never static but grows by sharing ourselves more fully and transparently. Jesus wants us to share his consciousness and his perception so that we can make room for the boundless intimacy of our Father.

We begin to open to the truth when we recognize that our point of view is a partial truth - maybe the best we can do, but partial nonetheless. As we cultivate openness and pay attention to reality beyond our point of view we will become aware of the barriers implicit in our ignorance. Ignorance means that we simply are not aware of the limits of our perceptions and beliefs.

"For things to reveal themselves to us, we need to be ready to abandon our views about them." Being Peace - Thich Nhat Hahn

For most of us the turn towards truth begins when we notice the inconsistencies between our image of ourself and the way we actually act.

2. Not Doing.

The greatest and most difficult learning is to trust the truth of Trinity's unconditional love, guidance and support. We basically need to learn to relax into greater awareness. By neither acting on our automatic impulses nor suppressing them, we begin to understand what is causing them to arise within ourselves. But this means breaking our analytical and judgmental ways of thinking.

3. Openness to the present moment.

Our mind causes us to limit our experience of ourselves by holding onto our self image and denying any experiences that do not fit it. The basic way to get around this is to let go of the past or future and simply be present to our immediate sensations. Again, this is about breaking our habitual way of approaching our life. We need to focus our awareness on the reactions of our body, which is always in the present.

4. Getting Support.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

We need a community, friend or spiritual director who can foster our development. This is made difficult because many of our friends, with the best of intentions, have very narrow perspectives. People who support your soul self leave you with a feeling of fresh and peaceful energy. Their presence and support helps release life giving energies within you.

We actually respond to one another's energy more than to their exact words or actions. In any situation, we are taking or giving energy in relation to one another. We all feel, suffer, or enjoy the difference but few of us are aware of what it is that is happening.

This is why we begin by learning to be present to our body and the energy being released within us.

5. Learning from Everything

What is happening right now is what we need to deal with. We need to be present to ourself, breath into our present experience and let it express itself more fully. It will unravel itself when we give it our attention.

6. Cultivate a Real Love for Our Self.

This often begins with a fierce determination not to let anybody or anything imposes their expectations on us. True love, mirroring Trinity's love, entails a profound acceptance of our selves. This is real humility, learning to love our whole self just as Trinity does. We need to be present and settle into ourselves as we actually are without attempting to change our experience.

7. Have a Practice.

We need to set aside time each day to focus on our connection to Trinity. We are an expression of Trinity's love and we need to reawaken to this reality every day. A true spiritual practice interferes with our deeply ingrained habits and gives us opportunities to wake up from our illusive images and judgments.

In truth, all seven of these tools are variations on the same theme. They are about helping us be present to ourselves; beyond the illusions we have of ourself, with the kind of unconditional love with which Trinity is present to us. Trinity is always present to help us and our practice is just a way of accepting the gift.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

Student: "Where did the universe come from?"

Teacher: "Where does your question come from?"

Our questions are created by the same loving energy that is creating the universe. This creative energy, loving us into existence, is the well spring of our meaning and our will to live, the source of our deepest desires, values and dreams. We all thrill at the sight of beauty because this loving

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

and creative energy entices us with the promise of an intense involvement in the mystery of the loving Presence who is the Source of our life.

The word “soul” refers to our life-force, the basic energy of our being. This life force is really, guilelessly us with no pretensions, as we truly are in all of our limited and divine beauty. In the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) our Creator molds the clay of the earth into a human shape and then breaths divine breath into that clay so that it becomes a living human being, living with God’s breath. This is not a historical fact, it’s the meaning of all facts.

We live because the very life force of God is breathing us. This life force expresses itself in our desire to be loved and to be loving. This life force is personal, God loving us, choosing to create us and offering us the opportunity to respond freely and creatively as partners in Trinity's creation. Our purpose is to participate in the love that creates us at every moment. Because this is our nature everyone has a “spiritual” life, a soul life.

Recently I’ve begun to realize that when I am praying I am actually participating in Trinity’s praying. My prayer is the energy of Trinity’s prayer happening within me. It’s clear that my desire to pray is bigger than me and it expands me beyond the many things that I want to prayer for. When I participate in prayer I am carried beyond myself. Prayer connects me to Trinity by allowing me to experience the reality of Trinity as the Source of my life.

The role of religion is to help us make this connection, to awaken us to the reality of the Trinity as the intimacy of our soul. Religion should help nurture us as soul. But most often it focuses on our ego. Whenever we hear about how we must change ourselves, or must do this or that, we are being reinforced in our ego.

At the center of all that we call religion – faith, prayer, truth, gratitude, wonder, love- is the reality that Trinity is its Source. Trinity is already doing it within us and we must become alert, we must become aware of this reality. Becoming aware of Trinity as our Source and becoming aware of our resistance to trusting Trinity to be our Source is the intention of spirituality. When you read the Gospels you know that you’re catching their meaning if they lead you to experiencing Trinity as the living energy of compassion working within you. When you go to Mass you will know that you have truly and fully opened your hearts to “the Real Presence” if you are filled with that Presence to the extent that you are more “really” present to the people you meet.

The question I constantly ask myself is “What will help me experience these realities in the unique experience of my living?” If I am not living my faith, expressing its values and qualities in my life, then I have missed the point. And if I am missing the point I need to turn to Trinity for help – which, actually, is the point.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

Inner Views

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual awakening is simply accepting our life as an expression of Trinity's loving. The struggle we experience along the way comes from letting go of our judgments, expectations, and analysis so that we can focus on what is true rather than what we expect or want to understand our life to be.

The change of focus is a letting go of our ego's mentality so that we can receive from the divinity of our soul, from the Divine Presence loving us into existence. Our ego developed so that we could recognize our unique self as separate from others. When this happens in tune with our deeper soul nature our ego becomes a container that gives form to our soul's sacred qualities.

Left to itself our ego splits all of our experiences into halves and then judges one half as good, valuable and worthy of our self while labeling the other half as wrong or bad. I know this makes our life seem much more complex but once we begin to understand the way our ego misshapes our reality we will be able to loosen its grip on our self awareness and make room for an awareness of Trinity loving us into existence. We allow our ego to become a container that is able to stretch and receive a more inclusive and compassionate sense of our self and one another. This is what the author of the 1st Letter of John talks about in these terms: *"Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be named God's beloved children; and that is what we are.... We shall be like Jesus because we shall know him as he really is."* (1 John 3:1-2).

This becomes complex because we approach it through the eyes of our ego. Up to now this is what we've been trained to do. We've been taught to approach ourselves with judgments and to demand change, demand that we become different from our present reality. But the only differences we can conceive are mere replications of what we are already doing. A real change demands a different attitude toward ourselves, a gentle, peaceful and compassionate acceptance of ourself as we are at this moment. And this attitude is itself a grace, a gift we can only receive – but can't impose upon our self.

Now we're inching closer to "truth." We are what we are and when we accept this we open ourselves to receiving more, to a transformation of our attitude, a broadening of our reality.

We talk of this as "a spiritual journey" and "walking a spiritual path" but these are at best half truths, the vista of our ego. Our soul vision tells us that there is no place we need to go. God is already here, right where we are. We don't have to reach God. Our life is already, by its very nature, an expression of Trinity's love. We would not be here unless Trinity were here loving us into existence. We are already holy. We just need to wake up to Trinity's truth working in us and learn to express it through the container of our ego.

Our awakening to this soul dimension is a gift. We cannot force it but we can sensitize ourself to its possibility and gradually open to its reality. You will know this has happened because you will be inflamed with a longing that will never again let you linger in the complacency and partial fulfillment of business as usual. The Divine will make itself know with a gnawing urgency. Behind your judgments, below your words, beyond your thoughts, in letting go of your self image, the silence of another world fills you.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Up to now you've been content with a relentless search for the factual. But now you know this for the hollow expectation it is. Now truth is your ultimate project. As John O'Donohue says: "We can often forage for years in the empty fields of self analysis and self-improvement and sacrifice much of our real substance for specks of cold, lonesome factual truth. The wisdom of the tradition reminds us that if we choose to journey on the path of truth, it then becomes a sacred duty to walk hand in hand with beauty."

I experience this as a dissatisfaction and frustration with ideas. Frankly this is strange to me. I've spent most of my life feeding on ideas, insights, and awareness. And yet now I feel that almost every statement I hear or utter is only partial. People share some of their insights and I think, "Yes, I can see truth there – but there's more." Conversations often leave me feeling flat. And yet I feel greatly privileged just being with the person. And I find joy in simply letting myself bask in the moment – to tell the truth, just some moments. But I'm becoming open to a greater variety of moments. And I'm beginning to believe that the spiritual path is simply about letting a moment be – whether it fits my agenda or contradicts my hopes.

Let me leave you with this poetic bit from John O'Donohue:

You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you."

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

What we want most urgently and with great necessity is for the kindness that is hidden in the silence of the Universe to take on flesh in our life. We ache with an intuition that we belong here, not to something, but to someone. We call this someone God for lack of a more intimate recognition. And we read in our sacred books that this "God became flesh and dwelt among us"(Jn 1:1ff.) Somewhere in history this happened and now we try to recognize its reoccurrence in our personal history. We need warm flesh and pulsing blood to speak our name with divine

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

kindness. We are fatally wounded and crippled until we are addressed with a kindness that calls forth the dignity living within our vulnerability and crouching behind our fears.

The great mystics and saints tell us that this is actually already true for us at every moment. There is no moment in which we are not already lavished with divine Presence, being called into existence as divine expressions of love. That is what they tell us. And I believe it, but I don't experience it with the immediacy necessary to give it power in my life.

At this time in my life I'm feeling like most of what I'm used to doing and thinking and perceiving is really just a distraction from what I most deeply desire. And yet I find it exceedingly difficult to bring that deep desire into the focus of consciousness and awareness. It seems to be dancing around the periphery of my awareness. My hunch is that this Divine Presence, the loving kindness from which our lives and the universe spring wants to break through into our consciousness. But right now I'm not sure if that is anything more than wishful thinking.

What I'm vividly aware of is that most statements that I hear and many that I make fall far short – even to the point of being downright lies. Not conscious lies, not attempts to conceal something, or mislead someone – but lies just the same. Lies, because something in me is avoiding what is right before my eyes – but I'm denying it.

I'm saying this to clear it out of my system, hoping that if I say it as honestly as possible this honesty will carry me into greater clarity. Somehow recognizing what is happening without judging it or analyzing it opens us to a truer sense of what is. This is the spiritual path of waking up to what is already here.

One of the revealing moments for me recently has been the political maneuvering during this pre-electoral season. As I look for some insight into a way forward as a nation I hear nothing but the willingness to boldly falsify opposing points of view. Politicians and pundits speak foolishness and distortion with authority and conviction as if their loudness and repetition made it true. They trumpet half truths and adamantly pose them as reality. The vividness and viciousness of these lies makes it clearer for me and helps me to see through my own distortions when I project my judgments onto other people's motivations. I begin to see the foggy nature of my own shadowed consciousness. I realize that I would rather hold onto my opinions and beliefs rather than deal with reality. And yet reality is the only possible place to meet God. To avoid reality is to lie to our self – no matter how good our intentions or how noble our desire to protect the righteousness of our beliefs.

I'm becoming intensely aware of my human psychological and physical limitations. When I was younger I had the future in which to improve myself. That excused me from the necessity of this moment. Now that future is only a moment away. This moment is, realistically, most urgent. And yet the only way through the fog seems to be to pay attention to right now with as little pretension, hopeful expectations and judgments as possible. Nothing else seems to be worth the time, effort and attention. And yet there are practical realities I have to deal with. The details and problems of day to day living don't go away – no matter how unimportant they are in the face of eternity.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

I've got to tell you it feels good to say this out loud. I've felt this for a long time but it needs to be articulated before it can be drawn into awareness. It's funny in the sense of being odd and unfamiliar that this comes out of weeks of playing around the fringes of my awareness. I've felt uninspired, with nothing worthy of putting down on paper for the last four weeks. I was left to grabbing snatches of ideas that temporarily engaged my attention, knowing that they weren't worth much effort or thought on my part. But that was all I had to deal with at the moment. I say this to point out the value of staying with the process of our lives. It takes time for clarity to emerge through the dimness of our vision.

I've experienced this to be true in the retreats I've been part of for the last 15 years. From these I've learned over and over that the Spirit lives in the hearts of a community (Where two or three are gathered in my name) of people who are relaxed enough to listen to one another without judgments or dogmatic expectations. Wonderful and graceful moments have come out of these gatherings, moments that I would never have and could never have expected nor planned. These are graced moments of blessing. And these experiences lead me to want more. They feel true and real.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

We come alive spiritually by becoming more consciously engaged in the process of our life. The quality of this conscious engagement is immensely furthered by an unconditional acceptance of our self for all of who we are. We learn this from the people who care for us. We learn it from the beliefs about how we much approach our self; we can be taught to be harsh and demanding or to loosen our judgments, expectations and inclination to analyze our self. And we learn it as a gift of God's grace, as something we are taught by the intangible presence of God in meditation and prayer.

The most important part of the spiritual path is the journey, not the destination. Actually there is no place to arrive on the path. It is about who we become in relation to God, our self and one another as we journey through our life.

Another way of talking about this is "doing the will of God." This is often misleading because of associations we often make in talking about God's will. We talk about it as if it were something outside of us and contrary to our will, our desires and our personality. Actually it is a fuller development of our personality. If it feels foreign that is because it is stretching us beyond the self limiting perspective of our ego and the qualities we identify as being "me." Any statement we make about ourself can only be half true because words are limited by their very nature. God will bring us to the fullness of the qualities that make up our unique existence. Searching out the

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

“will of God” is actually about involving ourselves in the process of growth, expansion and inclusion that is the divinely mandated direction of our life.

We recognize this in the official ritual of church through the Liturgical Season of Lent. As we will be reminded throughout the coming Lent, this is a time of “repentance.” “Repentance” means to “turn around and see in a new way.” The repentance of Lent is a ritual recognition that we must constantly and consciously be engaged in the process of our Trinity’s unfolding of our lives. We set aside a season for this so that it will be a concrete part of our lives. Like all the sacramental structures of our church life this concrete reality points to the Presence of God as the Source of all that is happening in our lives. In other words, it points to what is always and already here, and gives visible structure to this invisible spiritual reality. The path of spirituality, the Way that is Jesus is more an act of wandering than of trudging towards a goal.

At one time I thought of spiritual growth as gathering more information, thinking that I would finally bring together all the pieces of the puzzle. But the puzzle became a field and the field periodically regenerates itself and attracts me more by its fragrance and beauty than by its descriptions. At this time in my wandering I’m beginning to realize that the field is far more cultivated than I first knew. And now I see it more as a garden. Thoughts and beliefs are like looking at the seed packets you get in a nursery. They help you imagine the possibilities but the experience of walking among the flowers, ferns, fruits and vegetable is so much more.

The Way of Jesus is more than a matter of new and more information. It's about realizing that our life is a garden of Trinity's love. Most of us suffer from blindness ("Have you eyes but see not?" Mark 8:18). Our vision is obstructed by our point of view and we find it difficult to let go of our accustomed way of seeing.

Jesus' whole life is about helping us trust Trinity's presence enough to see the beauty of our lives through Trinity's eyes. We are being led on a trust walk through our garden and here's a surprise, we bump into an elephant.

**** Life in the kingdom is like wine compared to water. It is an intensification and metamorphosis of ordinary life so that it becomes extraordinary.

Thomas Moore - Writing in the Sand; Jesus and the Soul of the Gospels 167

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

Give your life to Love. This is Jesus' basic message. It's not a Hallmark moment or as the Beatles sang "another silly love song" And it's not a pious phrase on Jesus' part - it cost him his life. He knows what it means from the core of his soul

And he means it in every meaning of the phrase. Give your life to Love - to God. Give your life to loving, which you must be taught and healed and stripped of all pretense to do

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

The kind of love Jesus is talking about must come from your heart and soul- from that place where God /Love is creating you at this moment. To get to your soul you have to give your life to dying to yourself so that you'll be free to love

Give your life because you experience the beauty and joy of life so much that you're in love with life, you're alive with the divine energy that is love. Give your life to love because gratitude spontaneously wells up when you pay attention to all that is given you.

Jesus told us to love NOW. Not when we're healed. Not when we've worked through our relational issues; not when we mature enough; nor when we finally feel lovable. These are all part of learning to love but they'll never happen unless first we choose to be loving. We must choose to care about others and then we'll be taught to love.

The ability to love is a gift that begins with making a choice. We'll know the gift, the love of God when we feel its power working in us. It's an unexplainable power working within us. Jesus' revelation is that because of his life, death and resurrection LOVE is already here for us and working within us - we only have to choose to give it room within ourselves.

Many of us learn the power of love when grief has stripped away the people we take for granted or when we grieve for losses within ourself. This is the point of this Sunday's Gospel in which Jesus, Mary and Martha grieve the death of their beloved Lazarus (John 11:1-45).

When we've been stripped by grief we know from experience what really matters, what is essential to our soul. For all its dislocation, cataclysmic disturbance and pain grief can carry deep within its darkness a light that helps us see from our soul. Our grief can crack us open and in our helplessness we know God's love as our Source, as our life that comes from beyond our power to create or control.

Here's the secret you learn only by living through it: all external things that we rely on to make us feel worthy or in control or lovable are just smoke. When they are blown away through sickness or grief we feel Love even more profoundly, intimately, and energetically.

Grief is the closest we come to dying for the sake of WAKING up to life. In the death of someone we love our grief is an intense awareness of life being stripped of all, externals We sense who they were beyond all the externals that charmed us or irritated us. Intuitively we know them from our soul but we've distracted by all the externals.

Risk all for love – it's the only way to be fully alive. Its the way to wake up to God who is the source of all loving. Jesus keeps bringing this up in this Sunday's gospel. Lazarus had to die to reveal the real heart of life

The fullness of life is this - to be loved as we are We long to live in a space where there is nothing to prove and protect and I am who I am simply because God chooses me. This is everything that we need. Jesus calls this the "Glory of God." "Glory" isn't about making God feel good about being God. "Glory" is god's joy when we awaken to the intimacy of God's love as the Source of all that we are and we do.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Actually this is also where prayer brings us , if we allow ourself to be lead in our prayer. If we don't get totally bogged down in trying to talk God into providing our shopping list of desires, we will let God be our soul. This is salvation. This is Jesus' relation to the Father and. Spirit. This is why Jesus died, to expose us to strip us bare of all pretenses.. And because of this Jesus was free to give us his Spirit, to recreate us as his continued living and loving body- historical and spiritual presence. Here is some wisdom from the Persian poet Rumi:

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house
every morning a new arrival

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.
Rumi

And just to add balance here is some wisdom from a third grade CCD student: "They say God loves everybody. I don't know how. I live with four people and they're too much for me."

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

I have to say this as clearly as possible: Judgments are hostile. Even this statement is hostile because it is only partially true. Any statement is only one side of a coin. At best it is partially true, one sided. And at best the coin is worth a penny. Ideas can only point to experiences that exist beyond the boundaries of thought. Experiencing the reality that is beyond the words is what matters.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Judgments are hostile. The other side of the coin is that we need to make judgments in order to function. We just need to know that they are limited, only partially true. And another side of a now three sided coin is that even with the best of intentions, with the sincerest of ideals, and the wisest of insights we will continue to make judgments.

Judgments are built into the functioning of our ego-mind. Their danger lies in our ego's proclivity in making them possessions, something we use to bolster our self worth and dismantle someone else's judgments.

The way to deal with this is by what Jesus calls "poverty of spirit." (Matthew 5). To be poor in spirit means that we recognize that we can't possess the truth any more than we can possess the weather. We can't possess the wind, rain or sunshine. At best possession is a legal fiction. We might have use of something but that use means nothing in terms of who we are. That use doesn't make us more important, or better, or more lovable.

And this is even more radically true when it comes to the ideas we use to judge each other. We may have ideas running through our head but the idea doesn't give us the reality that matters – the experience of Divine Love as our Source. Divine Love isn't ours to possess. It is a gift to receive and give away in being loving. This is the only true way of relating to God. It is what we most deeply desire. But our need to possess it makes our relationship a lie. We don't and we can't possess God. Love can only be received as a gift and surrendered to as the source of our meaning.

The terrible irony is that we try to possess God and in our failure to hold God within the boundaries of our mind we blame our selves. We have been taught, and the teaching sticks, because of the nature of our ego. Our ego uses judgments to force us to be better. It uses judgments against ourselves. Judgments are the way we normally approach our self in the hope of making ourself a better person. The problem with this is that in the hostility of judgment we split ourselves into categories of good and bad. We reject the "bad" in favor of becoming "good." But that rejected "bad" part of our self becomes our shadow. It doesn't go away. It is simply pushed into the darkness of our unconscious where it continues to influence our lives.

Jesus tells us "Judge not lest you be judged." Judgments are hostile and make us form our lives in hostile terms. And this creates a fissure between God and our self. Not that God rejects us, God is unconditional love. But our judgments cast God in a hostile light as the one who judges us when in truth we are judging ourselves.

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

"Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate."

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you... For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you." (Luke 6:36-38).

Some people feel threatened by this statement. Some read it as another command, a task to be carried out - or they will be judged. For them "be compassionate" is canceled by a threat of being "judged."

To understand what Jesus is saying you have to be caught by his point of view. Since the revelation of his baptism ("You are my Son, my beloved, on whom my favor rests" (Mark 1:11), he has been awakened to his life in the intimacy of the Father's unconditional love. Like all bearers of good news Jesus wants us to share in his awakening. He wants us to know that we too are "Beloved." We too exist in the heart of our Father.

When we begin to catch Jesus' awareness we awaken to a way of life far more generous and forgiving than we would claim for ourselves.

****"Forgive and you will be forgiven, give and gifts will be given to you."* (Luke 6:37)

When we are able to forgive someone who has grieved us we live in a world bigger than our judgments. Our forgiveness comes from beyond us, it is more than we can manage for our self. We realize that we live in forgiveness, we are recognized as being more than the pain we cause with our fears and woundedness. We begin to see ourselves as more than any of that, as "Beloved."

When we find the generosity forgiveness spontaneously erupting within us we know it is a gift. A gift that reminds us of a Giver who doesn't bother to hold us to account. This is the Father who ran down the hill, arms wide open, to embrace his prodigal son (Luke 15:20ff.). This Father asks for no payment, he is simply delighted to have his Beloved close to his heart.

We grow and mature spiritually by letting go of our judgments, expectations, and opinionated beliefs. It's not that we can absolutely refuse to judge. We can't stop judging because our mind works by judging. That's how we make practical decisions. But we can stop taking our judgments so literally and seriously. At best they point to a partial truth. They are temporarily practical, but always limited. "Judge not" is Jesus' invitation into the way of living the life of the Beloved. The measure of his life is unconditional Love.

"For the measure by which you measure is your measurement." (vs. 38)

People often talk about a difference between spirituality and religion. Religion is seen as dogmas, rituals and traditions. For some this is comforting, especially in a culture in which everything is relative. For others this is seen as confining and inhibiting.

Spirituality is the process of awakening to who we are because of whose we are. It is focused on our experience of ourself as we learn to let go of our ego as the center of our reality. Authentic spirituality heals the wounded self by opening it up to the Divine Presence loving us into existence. And then spirituality encourages us to be that loving self for others.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

I believe that true religion can offer its tradition, ritual and treasury of wisdom as vehicles of this spiritual authenticity. And you know that religion is true to its best tradition when it creates communities that support and guide your spiritual aliveness.

But when religions lose their connection to their fundamental spirit they become defensive, exclusive, condemning and unable to forgive the humanness and limitations that we are all prone to. They become entrenched in rigid metaphors that seem to have lost their soul. I believe it's up to all of us to learn to mine the rich treasures of our tradition, to look through the externals to the inner meaning and connect to the compassion and forgiveness that is Jesus' legacy to us.

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

What if we were assured of going to heaven?

What if you are assured that you are going to heaven? How would that assurance change the way you experience and live your life?

As a matter of fact I believe we are assured. I believe that it is God's nature to love us so compassionately, with all our quirks and limitations as well as our soaring expressions of our soul self, that we are recipients of heaven. We are already living in the presence of God – which is the classic definition of heaven. If this weren't true we wouldn't be.

The problem is that when we're blind to this as our reality we feel like we're in hell, or at times, a living hell. I believe that is what Jesus is talking about when he talks about hell or Gehenna. It is not about threatening us with everlasting punishment and damnation, but he is describing our actual condition when we feel disconnected from God and one another.

I also believe that there is a time in our life when threat of punishment is something we need to create necessary boundaries for our lives. and there is a time in our cultural history that we as a society need to be coerced into living so that we can be a society. This has been a contribution of our Christian churches that have laid the foundation for our present culture.

But there is also a time when we're ready (or graced) to let go of fear and embrace the reality of the God who is Love. I suspect that if you're reading this you're at that point.

I can tell you from my own experience that embracing and accepting the certainty of heaven freed me to develop in a whole new way. Accepting the gift of heaven, of God's love didn't become an excuse for doing whatever I wanted, but a freedom to express myself in a positive way by allowing myself to be taught by God's love. I grew up with the promise that if I went to Holy Communion on the First Friday of nine consecutive months I would "merit" the assurance of heaven. I was going to a Catholic grammar school at the time. We had to go to Mass and

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

communion on the First Friday of every month. I completed the cycle three times and it eventually led me to believe at that young ages that “I’m going to heaven.” And I believe that that assurance has a positive and inspiring impact on my life. it set me at ease with God and allowed me to trust in God’s sustaining guidance and presence.

In this Sunday’s Gospel Jesus tells us “I am the Vine and you are the branches. My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit.” Jesus is not talking about what could be, he is describing the deepest, truest reality of what is. Its not “My Father WILL be glorified,” but “my Father HAS BEEN glorified in your bearing much fruit.”

Jesus is telling us that the same life energy that makes “me who I AM” is the Life Energy that makes us who we are. “Just as the father and I are one you are one.” We (as a community of Christ) and the Father are One, we are sisters and brothers, beloved of our Father. We can all Jesus’ God and Father our own God and Father. Our Father’s loving energy make us who we are. We breath God’s Spirit, we pulse with God’s passion, we live on God’s love and on loving like God, especially as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. “MY Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit.”

Because it is based on love this relationship is mutual. Our Father is gloried in you, our Father treasures our loving. God is glorified in our existence and our expression of his loving. God has created us to respond to love and in a way that we can grow in our response.

When we don’t respond with love we feel out of touch with our source of life. we feel severed from the Vine. And that feeling can be a wake up call, hell on earth, an alarm calling us back to our roots. Pruning creates the possibility of more healthy vines. Pruning cuts off the parts of us that are dead so that we can be more vital in our living. Pruning is not a threat it’s a gift of love – even though it usually doesn’t feel that way when it’s happening. Pruning is a way of cutting away the deadness and deadening part of our life. It’s a way of allowing God’s loving energy to flow more freely.

“God has been glorified in your bearing much fruit.” Be assured of heaven and let God grow you as a branch of Christ’s divine life.

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

In these pages I’ve used many words to try to uncover the Presence of Love that is best known in silence. Here is a poem by Jan Janada that in its simplicity exposes our self hidden in the Loving silence.

The sea

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

in storm
in calm

remains

in cyclone
and doldrums

the sea

containing
supporting

embracing
and
holding
life

in dark
and
light

so the
mystics
say

we swim
in
Deity

Jan Janada

Awakening to God as our Source of living and loving cannot be manufactured or achieved by an act of will or intention. Friendship is always an act of recognition. But we do have reasons for hope. First of all we are looking for this love. This desire doesn't just arise out of the darkness of our aloneness. This desire arises out of the second reason for hope – we are desired. This is God's choice, just as we wouldn't exist unless God is choosing to create us and love what God creates.

I often wonder about what it is that resists love within us and what is needed to finally push us over the edge into the boundlessness of our God of love. As much as we might want to step out into the abyss we still need a nudge. Stepping into boundlessness remains a grace, a gift from a Giver.

In the doldrums of a disintegrating moment of my life, when I felt totally broken, I felt a childish giggle deep within the dark pit of my stomach. And I knew for a brilliantly brief moment that my life was coming from beyond me. It was a gift and in that instant briefness I knew the Giver.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Once we awaken a search beings and we can never go back. From then on we are inflamed with a special longing that will not let us rest. The Divine becomes an urgency and we are driven to track it down through the myriad twists and turns of our living experience. This awakening of Love's Presence is like the dawn breaking out of the darkness. Where before we felt anonymous we now become alert to an intimacy. Where before there was fear we now know the urging of a courage we previously thought impossible. Where before we felt like we were awkwardly and clumsily stumbling through life we feel a graceful rhythm enlivening us. We are at home among the limits, tragedies, surprises and ordinariness of our human and divine heritage.

Let me leave you with this blessing from John O'Donohue:

"For Equilibrium, a Blessing:

Like the joy of the sea coming home to shore,
May the relief of laughter rinse through your soul.

As the wind loves to call things to dance,
May your gravity be lightened by grace.

Like the dignity of moonlight restoring the earth,
May your thoughts incline with reverence and respect.

As water takes whatever shape it is in,
So free may you be about who you become.

As silence smiles on the other side of what's said,
May your sense of irony bring perspective.

As time remains free of all that it frames,
May your mind stay clear of all its names.

May your prayer of listening deepen enough
to hear in the depths the laughter of god."

— [John O'Donohue \(To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings\)](#)

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

"His in thought, our in action."

When I graduated from the high school seminary in June of 1964 we were expected to choose a class motto and class song. We chose "His in thought, our in action" for our motto. It fit us well. We were full of mindless energy at that time. Doing something, acting, made sense in an instinctual way. What we did or why we acted wasn't too important to us. We were idealistic and pretty much self absorbed. Action as an ideal was a way of feeling better and more idealistic

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

about ourselves. We choose the motto mostly because it sounded “cool”. The motto has taken on more meaning and nuance over the years.

Our class song went something like :

No man is an island
 No man stands alone.
 Each man’s joy is joy to me.
 Each man’s grief is my own.
 We need one another. So I will defend.
 Each man as my brother
 Each man as my friend.

At a time in life when making friends seemed to be the most important goal of life this made sense. It was also a time of creating a sense of individuality. We were trying to become “our own man!” So it was mostly about our need for support rather than our desire to support each other. Now, more than 46 years later what I knew only intuitively has become much more real and inclusive.

We need each other. Absolutely! No one of us makes it on our own. We, whose nature is revealed in the Trinity, exist in mutuality. And yet the other side of the coin is just as true. There are some things that happen only when we act on them for ourselves. Jesus tells us “Call no one teacher, father, master except your heavenly Father (Mt. 23:9). Everything comes from our Father but we must learn how to live it by acting for our self. Other people can share their point of view but we must learn for our self. Like all great realities this is a polarity. We must receive but we must also act for our self.

Unfortunately in our modern polarized culture we have set these complimentary elements in opposition of each other. Look at our political debate and the way it tries to falsify the opposition. We tend to do this to one another- when we disagree. We mature spiritually when the point of view of our story is able to expand to accept more of reality, often the opposite point of view, into our awareness. This is a compassionate expansion. It is about letting go of our identity, our self-definition, to include more of reality. It releases us from the isolation of our ego. This self-isolation is what Jesus called “hell.”

Instead of limiting ourselves to abstract and unreal expectations we learn to open ourselves to Divine Presence through faith and trust. It is a letting go of a detachment to ideas about our self that allows us to be in harmony with Divine and Loving Presence. The traditional word for this attachment to abstract ideas about our self is “Pride”- more about that next time.

Ken Sedlak CSsR - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS
 The Trap of Pride

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Pride is a basic sense of self that each of us developed a way of interacting with our life that we believe helps us to survive. We feel that this way of acting is our reason for being. And in truth it reflects a deeper divine quality that is our soul purpose. But it is a very limited idea about our self. The problem is that we cling to the idea so tenaciously that it becomes our primary way of dealing with everything that comes our way. We believe that this is who we are, and this confines us to a narrow set of motivation, actions and self-perceptions.

Instead of limiting ourselves to abstract and unreal expectations we are meant to let go of our detachment to ideas about our self so that we can be in harmony with Divine and Loving Presence. One of our main points of resistance to this expansion is our habitual and addicted self definition. Classical theology calls this “pride.” And Spirituality is about integrating the oppositions into the wholeness of our personality. This is called “salvation.” It’s living in harmony with Divine and loving creativity.

The last time I wrote about this a friend told me its “too negative.” It does feel negative when your first read about it. But the point is simple, if we become aware of the self-perceptions that binds us to a repetitive set of motivations and actions we can begin to be free of them. And when we’re free we’re able to open to more of reality and Divine Presence. We are freed to relate to the complexity of life and one another with fewer judgments and a more compassionate acceptance. This is where Jesus was trying to lead us. We are created to be his continued expression of Divine Love.

Again this is one of those things that sound easy to deal with. But in truth the pride that we chose to live feels instinctual, like it is *the way* I am and I must respond. It feels much more personal, an essential part of my personality. It feels like more than just an idea that I have about how I am.

Yet there is also a feeling of space between us and our choice – as if it were imposed upon us, or as if it does not really express and satisfy our deepest need. We feel some resistance as if we’re being forced into something we are not fully desiring. We feel anger or passive aggression, even though we’re just acting on who we feel we must be. We feel an ambivalence, as if this is something we must do but deep down we don’t want to do and we’re just tired of doing it.

There are nine possible ways we can use to create our limiting self image.

1. **Perfection** is tied to the image of “I am right, I am hardworking. I must do things right if I am to have any value.” We have bought into the illusion that we can be worthy only if we’re correct. Buried within this pride is the divine desire for integrity, commitment to perfection and dedication to structures. But this is buried under the demanding, compulsive and judgmental standards we demand of ourselves and other. Everything seems deficient to us. We must learn to live within our limitations, if we want out of this bind.
2. **Helpfulness** is tied to the image of “I;m helpful.” We have bought into the delusion that “I am good if I am loved by others and close to them” or simply “here I am, I’ll take care of you or at least entertain you.” This creates in us a craving for affection. But we cannot appreciate the affection shown us because we need to be helpful, not helped. This need to

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

be helpful and along with the competing aversion to be helped pulls us away from the person we are with at the moment. Instead of being present to the person we're with and from whom we want affection we are continuously on the prowl for affection anywhere but where we're at. Since we base our self worth on giving and doing for others we do not want to receive from others. We must learn that we are loved and cherished for who we are and let go of our desire to obtain love by being helpful. Buried deep within this is the divine gift of love, but to open to love we will first have to let go of our anger about the expectations to be helpful that we impose on ourself.

3. I am an **Achiever**. I am successful. This is built on the false assumption that we are loved for what we achieve rather than who we are. This pushes us to be super efficient in our drive for success and recognition. This also creates within us a deep sensitivity to what is esteemed in our culture and among our peers To move beyond this we must pay attention to the reality that outer success does not bring inner fulfillment or the feeling of true well-being. Often we have to fail before we find out that we're loved for who we are, not how we succeed.
4. The need to be **Special** is built on the image that "I must be significant and distinct, sensitive, highly unique in my drive for excellence." The illusion here is that "I am good only if I am true to myself." I struggle to be true to a sense of self based on the past. Love is a gift in the here and now, not something we obtain because we're special. These people tend to be highly sensitive, intuitive, empathetic, creative and passionate. They need to accept and appreciate the ordinariness of life.
5. **Knowing** is built on the self image that "I am perceptive and strive harder than others to really know." When I'm caught in this trap I am not willing to act until I fully understand what I'm doing. But the important realities of life are mysteries of divine presence. They must be embraced with openness rather than grasped as concepts. At the same time I'm not willing to accept other's care, concern and love unless I understand it. Those of us who live out of this image need to accept our neediness, that we can be loved even when we're not acting with total clarity and knowledge. People bound by this type of pride write articles like this.
6. **Loyalty** is a pride that deludes us with the belief that "I am good if I cover all the bases and do what is expected of me." The problem is that doing what is expected is not necessarily really meaningful to us. We struggle to build a situation in which we can feel secure, but we'll always feel anxious because we don't trust any situation or anyone enough to feel secure. We must learn that our demand for certainty just creates more uncertainty and anxiety. We must learn to have faith in our self and trust the goodness of God's creation.
7. **Easy Going Optimists** describe themselves as "fun loving, seeing the bright side of life, easy going, and positive." They buy into the illusion that "I am good if I feel good and am getting what I want." Although they pursue the things that they believe will satisfy them they still feel unsatisfied and frustrated. They get lost in fantasies about the future as a way of avoiding the pain of the present. They must learn to let go of their idealization of life and avoidance of suffering. Life as it is in the present is the only chance for satisfaction. And part of this means learning to be satisfied by "what is." The mystics continually tell us that the only place we can meet God is in the fullness of what is.
8. **Advocates for Justice**. The basic attitudes here are "I can do it. I'm powerful. I will do what is right and I will protect the weak." The basic delusion is the belief that "I will

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

survive and I am good as long as I am strong and in control of my situation.”

Unfortunately their struggle for control does not create a sense of safety. They are surprised when their pushing creates a push back, their vengeance in the name of justice leads to retaliation. They feel like they are just doing the good and righteous thing. Yet hidden behind their illusion is a domineering energy to which people inevitably react. They need to learn to approach situations without trying to overpower them.

9. **Peacemakers** describe themselves as “Easy to get along with.” Their basic delusion is that “I am good as long as everyone around me is taken care of or okay.” Their well being is dependent on everyone else feeling good and happy. The impossibility of this task leads them to “tune out” problems and robs them of their energy to act. They see love as conditional and themselves unworthy of love and respect. They need to stop looking outside of themselves for comfort and acceptance because they don’t trust what is outside. Peace and healing come from within. Our true nature is to be an inexhaustible font of serenity, acceptance and kindness. This happens only by tapping into our inner resource, the Divine Presence in the moment.

As you read over these nine styles you will notice that they are remarkably different in their perceptions and the energy they release through our lives.

What they have in common is that each style is a way of being less present and open to the immediate reality in which we find ourselves. And yet being present is the only way we can be truly loving and in harmony with divine Presence.

Each of these descriptions is a key to unlocking our habitual pattern of action and presence that with the best intentions has locked us into a perception and mode of action that leaves us perpetually unsatisfied.

Ken Sedlak CSsR - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

One of the insights that has had a major impact on my life is from the Jesuit spiritual writer Anthony de Mello who asks "How do you achieve union with God? The harder you try the more you push God away. You simply need to know that there is no distance."

Once again the wisdom of this statement strikes home for me. I'm feeling frustrated and this helps me be aware of what is happening.. What can I do to move beyond the frustration? Stop reaching! God is already here. To reach for God makes me go somewhere else, to an expectation that exists only in my thinking. But I still want to do something.

My frustration must mean I'm missing something. There must be something I should do. Last week Fr. Tom, in his bulletin article, talked about being in the present moment. As I reflect on what that means in my life I see it as a cluster of qualities that are all necessary facets of knowing through experience that "there is no distance" in the present moment.

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

Detachment; Letting go; Openness; Abandonment to Divine Providence; Silence; Mindfulness; Awareness; Truth; Alert to just this; Presence; Transparency and Vulnerability; Bodily awareness; Detachment; Patient waiting; Living in the present moment.

All of these are aspects of a basic quality of relationship that for me comes down to making space within myself and my awareness for God to be God in my life.

I don't think that this is something I can simply do. I think that trying to do it leads to frustration and to feeling helpless. But I believe that this frustrated helplessness is the possibility of being opened to God. I believe that God is always bringing us closer to the reality of God's presence through the experiences of our life. The more I can be alert to what is happening in my consciousness the more I can allow God to awaken me to the reality of God's presence.

Along these lines something that has been at the edge of my awareness for years is creeping forward into my consciousness. I'm aware that I continually have something I'm looking for as necessary for my happiness or at least for satisfied contentment. When I was first ordained a priest I found that when I put on a black shirt with a white plastic collar that I suddenly mattered to people. I had never felt like I was held in much esteem by anyone except my parents. And now I had instant approval.

I took this to mean that if I worked hard at getting approval I would find happiness. To tell the truth approval does feel good, but it quickly evaporates. There is no way to hold onto the glow of approval. And even more real is the experience of being devastated by disapproval. There is always someone who doesn't like what I'm saying or doing. No matter how much approval I've received it is easily negated by the slightest disapproval. To this day I am shocked by people who believe that their point of view is an absolute criteria by which I am judged. But I am even more perplexed by the fact that their disapproval, no matter how wrongheaded, carries more power than approval. This tells me that the problem is within me, that I need to adjust something in me and that God's loving presence has little to do with approval or disapproval.

The frustration of this experience led me to look elsewhere for happiness or at least for satisfaction. In my thirties the thought of creating a family, with a wife and children and a comfortable home seemed to be the answer. After all I had grown up in a happy family and my parents seemed to be very happy with their lives. At that time there was a fairly common belief that the pope would lift the ban on marriage for priests. I waited - but the pope didn't come through. Meanwhile I was working with couples and families who were struggling with their lives together and I realized that this was no easy solution. But even more clearly I realized that no matter how good a family I might become a part of there was still be a dissatisfaction in my life. I was craving something more.

I also realized that being a priest was very much an essential part of who I am and who I wanted to be. And the joy involved in being a priest had little to do with approval. A major component of the joy had to do with the opportunity given me to pay attention to my life experiences as an earthing of God's loving presence. I learned this from participating in discussion groups which were relaxed enough to move from purely intellectual conversations to becoming aware of the actual experience

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

of our living. This is where people's faith shows through and where our shared faith profoundly influences each other's awareness. This is where our coming RCIA program will lead.

Sickness and loss have left me vulnerable. We begin to know very concretely that we are not enough for ourselves - even if we add God to the equation. I've learned very graphically that people care and that the moments of being with these people are extraordinarily precious in their simplicity. People truly do radiate divine presence.

And now I'm feeling like there's something more. This something more has to do with not being able to hold onto the good moments. I need to pay attention to God teaching me to receive and be present to the goodness of this moment for what it is. To do this I also have to let go, relax my attempts to hold onto moments that I like. I need to learn to receive the in between for what it is. And I think this means letting go of my expectations that something will make my life better, that there's something or someone (God) to strive for. I have to let go of striving and hoping so that I can truly be present to what simply is, here and now, in this present moment.

Ken Sedlak CSsR - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS

How do you reach God?

Know there is no distance.

Now here's the thing; the distance talked about is not a matter of physical distance - like I'm standing across the street from God. The distance is a matter of thinking and the perception created by my thinking. As long as I'm thinking I'm creating a perception of distance. I'm filling my mind with ideas instead of leaving room for the Divine Presence that is loving me into existence at this moment. I am substituting ideas for the reality of God's who is here expressing divinity at this moment. I am believing my thoughts instead of being in the truth of this moment.

However, even this is another thought, an idea that distances me from the reality of God as the true presence - both Divine presence and my presence. Meister Eckhart tried to describe the non-distance of Divine Presence this way: "The eye with which I see God is the same as which God sees me." My being, my existence, my living is the same reality of God living me. Unfortunately even holding these profound thoughts in my mind creates distance. To move beyond this distance we have to free our minds from thinking - at least for a moment. And that is actually what started me down this path this morning. During meditation I did have a few empty moments or non-thinking. They were simple, free, and peaceful "seeing." You probably should stop reading these thoughts and look through your eyes. You'll be seeing God seeing through you and your seeing through divine eyes.

But I write on. I'm afraid that this not only seems like mind games but also may be just that. I've noticed that when I focus on just seeing that I am momentarily at peace, which is to say, "in divine presence." But as soon as I recognize this I begin to think about it and my thoughts intrude again.

Part of the reason I write is to become aware of my resistances to seeing and to gain awareness of the limits of my perspective. Often this allows me to let go a little more and open to the breadth of Divine Presence. I've found through the years of experience that my spiritual path

ARCHIVES SPIRITUALITY

needs three basic attitudes, acted upon over and over. These attitudes are : Awareness; Non-judgmental Acceptance of what I'm becoming aware of; and Willingness to Trust that the awareness is leading me beyond itself. I've found over and over that what feels like a breakthrough is simply a doorway to another perspective which will give way to another awareness. Throughout my life I've often felt like a new awareness and perspective have left me on my own. I feel like I'm stepping into the unknown, with no safety net from my belief system.

Some paths have led to dead ends. But others have led to the most important decisions in my life. And at the beginning both the dead end paths and the wise decisions felt the same. I had to travel along the path before I had a clue as to its value. I believe that God is with me and guides me through all of these paths. God is with me and guides me even in the wrong choices. God doesn't seem to need to protect me from my choices. God just uses my choices to continue to guide me. And I have learned over and over that the Gospels eventually alert me to Jesus' guidance in dealing with these paths and subsequent choices. Jesus too learned who his Father was through choices, dead ends and trusting the Spirit to guide him. Jesus needed people in his life to open his heart to the Father's presence and guidance. And Jesus often stepped out of activity into silence to be alone with his Father.

This is where my "seeing" leads me at this moment. Every once in a while it leads me to panoramic visions that speak to me on every level of my being and inspire me to continue on. Most often this seeing leaves me temporarily satisfied and inspired to accept these moments with gratitude.

At times I feel that I'm addicted to these moments of "seeing." Instead of enjoying them for what they are and resting in their gift I immediately look for the next breakthrough of "seeing." Instead of grateful acceptance I push ahead to a new fix. This is why I'm exploring the "present moment." I believe that this is a necessary discipline and practice. It's something missing in my spiritual living that is necessary to become present to the loving reality of Trinity expressing itself in my life. The "present moment" dissolves the distance.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. **PATHWAYS / Stillpoint**