

Sermon notes 11-27-11 Interview with Father William Menninger, Trappist Monk

Father Menninger lives in Colorado in a Benedictine monastery with other Trappists. Unlike the other monks of his (and most) order, he travels, but only 4 times a year to speak and teach.

He was interviewed by Pastor Pete. Here are highlights:

What is a monk?

A monk is a person living alone or in community in a life of single-minded devotion to God in prayer. In Father Menninger's case, his ministry is prayer for all people. The idea of the monastic life is to remove all things (activities, relationships, possessions) that, though they may be good, in the monk's view, keeps him from a lifestyle of continual prayer.

Are all monks the same?

There are monks from various orders (Franciscan, Jesuit priests, Capuchin, Benedictine (like Fr. Menninger). They can be divided into two practices: "active" vs "contemplative" orders.

Active orders do things like feed the poor; work in hospitals, schools, hospices, etc. Contemplative orders live cloistered and do not have contact (except limited) with outside communities except for certain times and purposes, including hosting spiritual journeyers like Pastor Pete when he travels.

Contemplative orders focus all of their activities around prayer. Fr. Menninger's schedule, for example, includes rising for prayer at 4:30a.m., as well as six other times during the day, spending hours in communal and individual silent meditation, reading psalms, teaching the Word and reading. In addition, this monastery has a farm and they care for the animals on it, bake and sell cookies and other manual work.

Why a monastery?

A monastery provides a controlled environment where the usual interruptions of busyness, electronics, commuting and other things are kept out. Living in community makes it a supportive environment as they each seek to stay true to God. It is an enclave allowing leisure time and space to contemplate God.

What is contemplation?

Contemplation is "gazing" (-l.j.) or meditating, pondering, basking in the love of God. Everyone contemplates when they give themselves over to the experience of the awareness of His presence. Fr. Menninger referred to it as "hugging God".

What is centering prayer?

*Note – different people and traditions would define contemplation and centering prayer a little differently, which is o.k. There is no "right" or "wrong" way.

Prayer = relationship with God.

There are 3 levels as described by Fr. Menninger:

1. Acquaintance- level, “give me”, spoken prayers
2. Friendship – dialog, talking and listening.
3. Affectionate prayer; meditating on scripture. Trials help develop a real love relationship.
4. Affective, emotional prayer born out of a heart deeply in love with God. Centering prayer = learning union with God in prayer.

Centering prayer refers to a quiet wordless being with God in which, as the speaker said, you “let go of everything that is less than God; worries, concerns, superficial things; and penetrate into the stillness in the depths of your being. God in us is closer to us than we are.

Small Group Discussion:

1. **Share your reactions to this message and the speaker. Were any thoughts, questions or emotions provoked?**
2. **What does the work “monk” or “monastery” mean to you in your present context?**
3. **Describe a time when you felt particularly close to God or particularly aware of His abiding presence with you. What activities, physical spaces, situations and attitude make it easier or harder for you to enjoy a state of contemplative awareness of God’s loving presence in your life?**
4. **Viewing and meditating on the scriptures below, is there any personal implication that God may be drawing your attention to at this time?**

Pray for one another and close.

Option: Set one concrete lifestyle goal that will help you in creating a life more singly focused on God’s love and on prayer.

Galatians 4:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba, Father.*” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Luke 10

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”