Columns
Spirituality



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For many years I have been writing for this column, "Contemplate This." This title often makes me pause as I reflect that contemplation does not have an object on which it focuses — if what is meant by that is bringing to bear your rational and emotional faculties to observe, interpret or understand the object of attention.

"Contemplate" as a verb conveys a different type of knowing, one that is anchored in the heart (which is understood not as the seat of emotions but as an organ of perception.) Contemplation invites us to a new way of seeing, of knowing, that is rooted in the indwelling of Divine Love.

As we enter the Lenten season, I felt that a renewed contemplative practice might be just what is needed.

There are so many things attracting our attention throughout the world and in our lives: Russian troops poised on the border of Ukraine. Climate change affecting some areas with drought and others with horrendous storms. Inflation causing us to spend more money on essentials like food and gas. The toll of COVID-19 expressed in ongoing illness, death, isolation, uncertainty and divisiveness. Growing anger by those who oppose government actions to contain the spread of the infection, and claiming their right to freedom. State laws in the U.S. sanctioning civilian vigilantes to enforce restrictions on abortion and voting rights.

Certainly, each of these situations demands our attention and calls for action. However — too often — thinking about what is going on evokes anger, frustration, sadness and powerlessness within us. We are trapped in assumptions, worldviews and ways of thinking that keep us responding in old ways that only seem to exacerbate the situations.

Contemplation helps us to "see" in new ways, inviting us to respond out of love and not fear.

Liturgically, the Lenten season takes us on a journey. The story of Jesus' public life is told once again. We witness a man who responded to the injustices of his time in ways that reflected a different worldview. He saw all as equal and not divided by the purity code of his time. He welcomed the unclean to join him. He healed those who couldn't see physically but could "see" the power that Jesus offered them when he

would ask, "And what do you want me to do for you?" He proclaimed his truth even though it would incite the ecclesial and political authorities. He loved and forgave those who could not accept his words, his invitations and who persecuted and crucified him.

Jesus responded to the injustices of his time out of love and not fear, and without blame.

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The Gospels tell us that Jesus often prayed: intensely for 40 days, alone after giving of himself serving people's needs and exercising his power, and communally at meals.

I believe his prayer went beyond words, beyond thinking. Jesus rested in Divine Love but not a resting of inaction. Rather, that resting freed him from current ways of thinking and opened a spaciousness within him so that he could "see" in new ways. Jesus' heart became his organ of perception responding from the indwelling of Divine Love to be in service to all.

The magnetic center of Divine Love dwells within each of us — drawing us, inviting us to make the space for us to "see" in new ways and to respond from that love.

Perhaps the invitation of these next 40 days is to deepen or commit to a contemplative practice. If you don't have a practice you may want to begin with *centering prayer.* This is a practice where a very short word serves as your way back from distraction to the spaciousness of contemplation. Having consented to the working of God within you, every time you begin to think or something distracts you, you simply say the word and then let go. Letting go is key, for each time you let go you fall more deeply into the space where the Divine Mystery dwells. In silence you encounter God revealing not only God's self but your true self as well.

We are living in tumultuous times, in a time of chaos. We don't yet know how to respond in ways that heal. Taking time this Lent to simply rest in the indwelling of Divine Love will move us closer to seeing in new ways, so that we can begin to respond from love and not fear and without blame.

Endnote: You will find resources that can assist your contemplative journey at www.iccdinstitute.org. If you are new to contemplation you may find these articles

helpful. https://iccdinstitute.org/when-words-dont-work/; https://iccdinstitute.org/contemplation-a-call-to-all/; and https://iccdinstitute.org/would-you-stop-staring-contemplative-practice/.

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