

## Everyday spirituality

Sermon by Toni Maddi

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Spiritual practices, the rhythm of spirituality seems to have changed over the years from setting aside time to renew to a time you have to just get through. I remember when Catholics were allowed to go to Mass on Saturday afternoons after the Second Vatican Council of the 60s. Rather than setting aside a day to rest and renew and starting that day with a little worship, that “little worship” became an obligation. The church changed their policy and parishioners were allowed to fulfill their obligation the day before. This, of course, is not a change only Catholics have made. I remember, as a child, reading books like *The Great Brain* or the *Little House* books. In them, the children rankled at having to do nothing on Sundays. Do children need a day to “renew”? A nap is enough for most of them. And so the Sabbath of most Christian religions became a day of boredom and irritation.

Most of us have turned from this idea of Sabbath. Many of us have rejected it because it is a part of a broader range of religious practices we have rejected.

I was at work a couple of weeks ago and a client came in and, I’m not sure how it happened, but the conversation turned to my giving this sermon. He asked what I wanted people to walk away with. I told him I wanted people to find small, simple ways to be spiritual every day. He asked me if I did my job for God. At that moment, I had three conversations running simultaneously in my head. First, the God language. My mind was saying, “I don’t do anything for *God*, but I do try to find the purpose in a situation.” And another part of my brain was arguing, “Same thing.” The second (or is it third?) voice was chanting a little mantra, “Please don’t let him turn this to Jesus. Please don’t let him turn this to Jesus.” And finally, I was trying to come up with something to say to answer his question. I found I was still rejecting parts of my parents’ religion long after I had decided that, in the end, we all basically believe the same things. When I realized that, I found myself reframing what he said, changing the words, to create common ground. I thought about that conversation for a long time.

Today, when I say “God” please substitute whatever word you use to describe to ineffable.

In rejecting religious practices of our childhood, in dismissing customs of mainstream religions because of the dogma that surrounds them, have we thrown the baby out with the bathwater?

For a short time I had a column in our monthly newsletter. I interviewed a different member of the congregation each month and then wrote about their spiritual practices. So

I know that many of you have daily and weekly practices. But some of you don't and some of us who did have moved away from them.

[Here is what my daily practice used to be: I would get up at 5:00 and write in my journal for three pages. This cleared my mind and allowed me to focus on the next part, which was meditating. I would light a candle and meditate. After I felt centered, I would go through each chakra and feel its connection: root chakra connection to everything, grounding, next, the spleen chakra connection to people ~ I would go through my day and anticipate who I was going to see and what purpose they had in my life... that took about ten minutes. Then I would pray. I'd pray for about ten minutes. During my shower I would go through a list of affirmations. I'd leave the house feeling pretty grounded and renewed. During the four years I worked here at Unity Temple, I also had the luxury of being able to come into the sanctuary if I needed a break from the craziness that can accompany working in the office of a congregation.]

Have you ever thought about being a monk or a nun? It's always sounded very relaxing to me, spending the day in worship, meditation, learning and helping the community, whether the community within the monastery or the larger community. The Tibetan Buddhist's daily schedule goes something like this: 5:45 wake-up bell, morning prayer in the prayer hall with breakfast, recitation and memorizing prayer and ritual texts, Tibetan language class, English language class, lunch, more Tibetan language class, revision of the day's lesson, tea break, revision of recitation and memorization of the prayer and ritual texts, a break, the evening prayer and recitations, individual study, ending at 9:30 with bed and lights off. The 9:30 bedtime and 5:45 wake-up bell make it even more appealing to me because I'm an early riser.

Buddhist Nuns of the Theravada tradition have a similar routine: 5:00 wake up immediately followed by group sitting with chanting, breakfast at 6:45 followed by Sutta study. Work, drink / clean up, more group sitting, food offering, -including chanting, a half-hour Dhamma talk and a blessing. Noon: Clean up and rest until 2:00. Then individual practice, Vinaya class, alternating with individual practice, and work around the monastery as required, evening drink, showers ending with group sitting with chanting and a Dhamma talk on some nights. Bedtime is 9:30.

But we aren't monks and I doubt any of us plan to be. So how can we get spirituality infused into our daily lives?

St. Benedict is credited with being the father of Western Monasticism<sup>1</sup>. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century he wrote the rule that most Western monasteries continue to use today. It is a simple plan for living a balanced life, a life in community focused on God.

The first rule of St. Benedict is: Listen. Do you trust your inner ear? Do you listen with your heart? When you listen for the Divine, what do you hear? Can you distinguish the voice of the Universe from your own? (If you see the Buddha in the road, kill him...only if you view all appearances as non-appearances can you see the true Buddha). Here's something to try if you don't already do this: When you meet someone, send out the question "Why is this person here right now? What is there for me to learn from him or her? Or is there something I'm supposed to give to them?" Then listen for the answer.

The second rule of St. Benedict is: Pray. I especially like what the Rule says about prayer. It should be short and pure. It shouldn't be in embellished stilted language, it shouldn't employ persons or cases ye never doth use. You don't have to say, "Oh, god..." at the beginning of every sentence and you don't even have to end with "amen," which means "I back up this truth." Of course you do, you just said it. Monks pray five to seven times a day, centering on the Psalms. (If you feel you don't know how to pray, but you'd like to give it a try, you can buy a copy of the Psalms in more modern English, called *The Message*. The Psalms can become our words when we pray them. There is even a Psalm that is a plea for help in time of national humiliation [Psalm 74]. How's that for relevant?). Muslim men pray five times a day. The idea is to haul yourself before the Divine everyday no matter what, just like you would haul yourself to the gym or to work everyday, no matter what.

Which brings us to the third rule: Work. St. Benedict says, "Let there be specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading." Work is good for us. We can listen while we work. Work reminds us that we're not alone in the world. Work isn't a way to get to the weekend, it has value in itself. Ask, or pray, how can you be of service with this task or job? What can you learn? Think about all the jobs people do that touch you.

We have our work. Most of us went to school and majored in something. Many of us are working in fields we choose. But we also do other work and there is a spirituality in those tasks. Take doing the laundry. It's not a chore I've ever heard anyone say they enjoy. But maybe we can transform it into an opportunity to see renewal. Perhaps you can transform it into a way to connect to your week. As you sort the clothes, briefly review what you were doing when you wore that article of clothing. Were you present in that moment? Did you take away from that day what you feel you were meant to take? Or you can see it as a weekly version of the changing of the seasons, a way to remember the [majesty] of the cycle of nature. As the clothes hit the floor each night, or as you toss them down the chute, it's autumn. The clothes lying dormant in the hamper or in the basement are symbolic of winter. As you set the washer, feel winter is ending and spring is about to start, renewal is about to take place. As you fold the clothes and put them away, think of the summer, a kind of "the clothes seeing the light again." Or maybe you can get into the Zen of laundry: honoring the process, studying patience as you wait for the cycles to finish, listening to the rhythm and the hum of the machines. It can be an

opportunity to say a small prayer of thanks for the luxury of an automatic washer and dryer.

Or how about making dinner? I usually see dinner as a chore to rush through. But if I slowed down, I could make it into a chance to feel a part of the interconnected web of being. Think of all the people who were needed for you to make dinner: the people who made the metal, nylon, wood and plastic of the utensils you're using, the people on the assembly lines, those who packaged them, the truck driver, the people in the warehouses, the clerks at the stores where you bought them. The people who forged the metal for your knives and pots and pans. The engineers who designed your refrigerator, stove and microwave, the marketing people, the office workers involved. The farmers, corporate or otherwise, who raised that chicken, grew those vegetables, harvested the rice, brought it to market, the workers in the market...It took hundreds of people to produce the things you need to make a simple meal. After remembering, you might want to pray, "I value every individual who played a part in making this meal. May they feel a spark of pride as I send them my gratitude."

More rituals to shape the day

the week – back to Sabbath idea

the month? – moon?

the year.

## **Benediction**

from Gerald May (*Simply Sane*)

Can you, from time to time, just nurture a little warm feeling toward yourself? I truly believe that's all it takes (for sanity and realistic expectations). A little warm feeling created an atmosphere of acceptance, of allowing, of permitting. And within that atmosphere there is a kind of encouragement for the goodness to grow: the goodness that is you, the goodness that is life in you, the goodness of creation in you, God's goodness in you.

<sup>1</sup> Collins, Lonni and Homan, Father Daniel, OSB, *Benedict's Way an ancient monk's insights for a balanced life*, p.4