



# JUST Love

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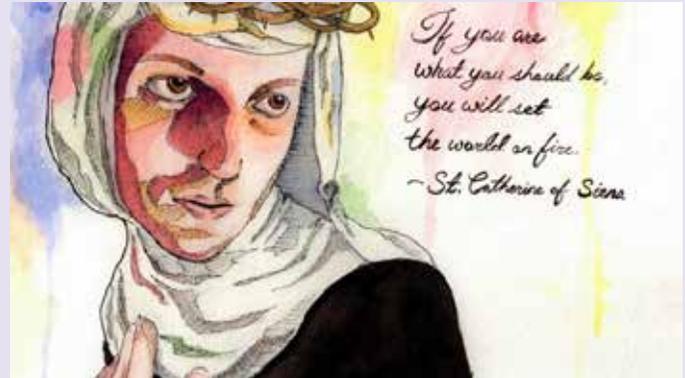


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## Mysticism and Prophecy: One Sacred Wellspring

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There is probably no more familiar story of Jesus than the parable of the Good Samaritan. But at the heart of that well-known story lies a riddle that is a clue to its deepest meaning. We are told that the Samaritan, moved with compassion at the sight of the wounded man by the road side, provides first aid by pouring “oil and wine,” (Luke 10:34) into the wound. As anyone who has worked for a Scouting first aid badge would know, this is poor procedure. A wound should first be disinfected (by the wine) and then soothed by an ointment (like the oil). The fact that the Samaritan reverses the order is a jarring detail meant to provoke our attention. It is a reference to the fact that animal sacrifices in the Temple in Jerusalem were accompanied by a libation, a pouring out, first of oil and then of wine. Jesus is not merely saying the Samaritan is kind. He is saying something far more radical – that the Samaritan treats the body of the wounded man as if it were a sacred object. The Samaritan, who would be prohibited from entering the Temple, tends broken humanity with a gesture that is liturgical. The priest and the Levite pass by the potentially defiling body of the wounded man out of respect for liturgical law. The Samaritan weaves liturgy and life into one seamless whole and becomes the very model of Christian discipleship. Mysticism and prophecy flow together from one sacred wellspring.

What image comes to mind when you hear the word *mystic*? Perhaps Catherine of Siena swept up in ecstasy, experiencing a mystical wedding with her Divine Spouse. But investigate deeper and discover that her experience of mystical marriage impelled Catherine out of her hermit's cell into prophetic action in the world. Traveling Europe

with her *bella brigata*, her “delightful gang” of disciples, she denounced Pope and Emperor and stood up to lynch mobs. She accompanied to the scaffold a man condemned to death for political protest against the Sieneese government and assured him that he would be waiting for her in heaven.

What kind of person do you think of when you hear the word *prophet*? Perhaps Dorothy Day gazing up with steely yet peaceful determination at armed police on the United Farmworkers’ picket line in her 75th year. But investigate deeper and discover Dorothy the contemplative who never missed an annual retreat and spent long hours in silence and holy reading.

One person we almost certainly don’t think about when we hear the words *mystic* or *prophet* is ourselves. The words seem too extreme, pretentious even, to describe our own more modest ambitions in life. Prophecy and mysticism seem to allure us into dangerous territory. As one Irish monsignor is alleged to have remarked, “Ah, mysticism. It begins in mist and ends in schism!” And so we dampen the mystic spark in our hearts, the prophetic fire in our voices. We settle for so little for ourselves and for the world. But the wild and subversive spirit of God cups hands around our lives and breathes over us, fanning us into flame. Because God passionately desires intimacy with every person without exception, we can name the human journey as mystic. Because God’s justice is relentless until all creation enjoys God’s gift of shalom, the task of every human life is prophetic. The deeper we are drawn into mysticism or prophecy, the more we discover they are at their heart *one* path. As the great African-American prophet and mystic, Howard Thurman, often said – Go

deep into who you are and you come out smack dab in the middle of your brothers and sisters.

Mysticism and prophecy share a common focus on practice. They compel us to serious contemplation of two books – our check book and our date book. Time and money are energies we choose to release into the world. Mysticism and prophecy equally invite us out of the seductive world of thought and rhetoric and ask us: what is your deepest desire and what are you doing about it? How are you making your dearest dream for the world not a vague hope for someday but a present reality for today?

The mysticism and prophecy of everyday life invite us to three practices: radical amazement, letting go, healing and resistance.

Mystics and prophets are both captivated by the wholeness and beauty at the heart of reality, at the divine radiance that shines from creation. They are willing to gaze contemplatively at any reality until they perceive it rightly and name it truthfully. They are tireless in pouring healing balm on any brokenness, confronting any injustice until wholeness and beauty is restored. They practice radical amazement, confident that if they plunge themselves into the heart of any reality, both the delightful and the painfully broken, they will meet the Holy One. The prophet without a life of deep contemplation can become a joyless critic, shrill and empty. The mystic without a passion for healing the broken web of life can mistake escape from the world as a journey into God and become an addict of what life-long peace activist Daniel Berrigan names “a terrible kind of drug called contemplation.” Radical amazement allows mystics to find God in attention to something as common and as close as their breath. It empowers them to

persevere through the dark nights when God seems absent. Radical amazement strengthens the prophet to persevere through the dark night of resistance to evil which seems to have the upper hand.

Mystics and prophets accept the daily discipline of letting go and know the truth of the words of Meister Eckhart – the life of the spirit is more about subtraction than addition. The mystics of every tradition often seem subversive because they call us not to make idols of our cherished images of God and to expect many shatterings of idols as the God beyond all names draws near to us. Prophets know the painful process of letting go of dreams of easy success and instant change. In contemplation prophets find the courage to confront the violence in themselves. They know that failure to do so will make them the unwitting instruments of the oppressive structures they denounce.

Genuine prophets and mystics are never Lone Rangers but architects of communities of healing and resistance. Taking the time necessary for relationships of depth; cooking and enjoying a healthy meal with lively conversation long into the night; singing, art-making, playing: all these are prophetic acts of resistance to our dysfunctional, consumer culture. All these are mystical acts through which we are energized by the God who inhabits the intimacies of the atom and the swirling immensities of the galaxies.

Teresa of Avila says that her model of a Christian is someone who falls into ecstasy while frying an egg and doesn't spill a drop of oil. To be the mystic *and* the prophet – passionate and practical, witty and wise, earthy and ecstatic – to such a delightfully daunting destiny God has called us.



### **DATES IN AUGUST**

#### **6 Anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and (9) Nagasaki**

“International relations cannot be held captive to military force, mutual intimidation, and the parading of stockpiles of arms. Weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, create nothing but a false sense of security.” ~ Pope Francis

**10 Feast of St. Lawrence, Deacon of the Church of Rome** “The poor are the true treasures of the Church. The Church is truly rich, far richer than the Emperor.”

**15 Feast of the Assumption of Mary** – Since Mary is the first harvest of the Resurrection, it is traditional to bless flowers and herbs today. Get a bouquet of flowers or a sprig of parley and thank God for them.