

*The Spirituality
of
St. Marguerite*



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Part I

Spirituality

Our life's journey is a journey into becoming. We move from infancy to childhood, into adolescence, and from there, into adulthood – young, middle aged, and elderly. This is a journey we see repeated throughout all of nature and indeed throughout the cosmos. Stars are born, they grow and mature and finally die releasing all their energies giving birth to new stars and new galaxies.

Like the blossom on a tree, it is a journey of ripening. Ripening with the wisdom of timing, love, and patience, and brings to our hearts the freedom to be wise and not judgmental. It is the process of becoming. We know that nothing “gets it” 100% right away it is the work of a lifetime.

Our spirituality is our guide for this journey. Along this path there is a slow patient learning, oftentimes involving a letting go in order to create a readiness for a new kind of fullness – an unknown but exciting future drawing us to the next step in our ripening process. We slowly learn how to hope, to move outside and beyond ourselves. Even our gift of hope matures as we follow the path of our lives. At times it seems as though this process of ripening operates unconsciously and that every now and then we are jolted into a conscious awareness of who we are, of where we are going, and that our life has meaning and purpose.

Our spirituality teaches us to live with ambiguity and contradictions, and to rejoice in the paradoxes that life on earth brings. If we choose to follow this spiritual path it takes us on a journey from egocentricity into egolessness, a journey from separation into oneness, from loneliness into solitude. Our spirituality allures us deeper and deeper into the Mystery of Being. It draws us to an awareness of a Divine Reality inherent in all things; an awareness that within all there is a longing and a yearning to be at One with this Reality.

It is only through the eyes of our spirituality that we see Creation as the ecstasy of this Divine Holy Mystery we call God, the ecstasy of this communion of love. Our human relationships are a means through which we realize this state of wholeness. Our God is a wonderful symbol of the sacredness of our relationships – love giving and receiving and transcending itself in ecstasy.

It is only through our spiritual awakening that we become aware of the depths of love surrounding our very being. We are like fish, swimming in the ocean unaware of what water is; simply aware that it is a necessary part of its being. Love is what we were made for, and love is who we are. The Song of Songs (8:6-7) puts it well:

Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm.
For love is as strong as death,
its jealousy as enduring as the grave.
Love flashes like fire,
the brightest kind of flame.

Many waters cannot quench love,
nor can rivers drown it.
If a man tried to buy love
with all his wealth,
his offer would be utterly scorned.

God is constantly overflowing with Divine Love and all that creation can do is receive and participate. The Divine Holy Mystery is a source of endless creativity and imagination. Each moment is pregnant with new possibilities, new concrete expressions of the Divine with us waiting to be born. This outpouring of love in one direction creates a safe haven (an ocean) in which we live and breathe and have our being.

I am reminded of the sculpture by the Jewish artist Jacques Lipchitz.



Jacques had originally titled this piece ‘ Our Lady of Delight’ but for reasons it has been renamed “The Descent of the Spirit”. In the form of a dove, the divine Spirit is descending onto a divine feminine form that opens to give birth. On one level it points to the Jesus story conceived by the Spirit in the womb of Mary. On another level it points to the universe story. Everything is conceived by the Spirit in the womb of the Cosmos -- Everything is Sacred. The Divine Holy Mystery pregnant with creation and constantly birthing anew. What a wondrous reality.

Our journey, though it seems at times to be an ancient one, it is a journey of today and our spirituality, our guide, is in tune with the reality of the cosmic story of the 21st century. Within us is a hunger for the truth that is today, linked to, but not identical with, the truth of our ancestors, nor with the truth that will be. For truth, whatever it is, like all things, is on an evolutionary journey woven together with our universal evolutionary story, our human evolutionary story. It too is an integral part of our evolving consciousness.

There is an awakening taking place within the earth’s human community. With today’s technology we find ourselves more aware of how our institutions – economic, educational, political, religious – have failed us in so many ways. More aware of the injustices throughout the world, the inhumanity with which most of our earth community is treated today. A re-awakening to the words:

“What does it profit a man if he
gains the whole world but loses his soul?”
“Loses his sense of what it means to be human?”
“Loses his capacity to love and to be loved?”

Our spirituality is awakening within us an understanding that our interests are not separate from anyone else’s. Healing the wounds of the world is everyone’s responsibility and calls forth from us creative acts and ideas flowing from our imaginations.

Our consciousness is awakening to the realization that the future is in our hands – it is happening through us not to us. We are collaborating with the ever expanding cosmos by expressing creatively the ineffable mystery that surrounds us, sustains us, enlightens and sanctifies us.

As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

“Just to be is a blessing.”

“Just to live is holy.”

Consciously or unconsciously every day we awake to a blank canvas and every night we go to rest having created our masterpiece for the day. From our hopes and desires we create experiences and from them flow our stories to share with others. Our creative acts become the tool to ignite the imagination of others. Through our imagination our thoughts become our lives, our lives become our stories, and our stories become bridges to higher consciousness and to ultimate union.

Think of the prophets of old. They were not intellectuals nor theologians but they were story tellers. They wove exotic tales for people, painted pictures for people, challenging their imaginations to a life lived in harmony – harmony with self, with others, and with their God.

Our spirituality is asking us today to walk in the path of the prophets. To engage with the spirit within, to paint pictures and tell stories that will ignite the hearts of others. Just as photosynthesis came forth to enable the earth to evolve biologically, so we are now being called to enable the planet to evolve consciously. We find ourselves engaging in a process of converting intelligence into inspiration through our imagination. We are coming to understand ourselves as expressions of the universe, unique, wondrous expressions of the Divine Holy Mystery we call God. It is time for us to claim along with Jillian of Norwich: “we are of God” and with Henri Nouwen “I am a beloved son/daughter of my God.” It is time for us to call God home, reconnect ourselves to the natural world and proclaim the good news that we share a single origin, a single community and a single destiny.

It is time for us to claim our true heritage. We are spiritual beings struggling to know how to be human and NOT human beings struggling to be spiritual. From the moment of our birth we have devoted all of our time and energies learning how to be human – how to be successful, independent, motivated, self-reliant, self-sufficient, but in the process we lost sight of the *who to's* – who am I ignoring? Who am I stepping on on my way up? Who am I passing by on my rush to get ahead? In our struggle to become the human person our society wants us to be, we lose sight of the human person we were created to be. The truth of our spirituality long forgotten or relegated to the back burner as simply another thing that I need to get around to.

We are being challenged today to be open to the stirrings of the spirit within to grow in conscious awareness of who we truly are and to seek new ways to giving a

fuller expression of our God. New ways of living our humanity with ourselves, with others, and with our God.

Part II

The Good News of St. Marguerite

Reflecting on the gospel stories I became aware that they are stories written to help us come to an awareness of the Spirituality of a man called Jesus. A spirituality flowing from deep within his being, drawing him to become ever more human and sharing his humanity with all those he met. As he journeyed deeper and deeper into his humanity he also journeyed deeper and deeper into his divinity becoming at once fully human — fully divine.

The historical story of St. Marguerite has been written over the years by several different authors. Over the past 400 years we have been living her deeper story — the story of her spirituality— the gospel, the good news of Marguerite. This is the story that will be our guide into our unknown. It is a living unfolding story in which we have our individual parts to play.

In the beginning was the Dream
And through the Dream all things came to be
The Dream burst forth
giving birth to reality.
Everything that was, that is
and that is yet to become
are but expressions of the Dreamer
Who dared to dream Dreams.

On April 17, 1620 a girl was born in the city of Troyes, France. Her name was Marguerite and her birth heralds that a new voice will be heard. A voice that gives hope; a voice that brings good news to those that are poor — poor in Spirit, poor in physical well-being, poor emotionally, poor of heart. Her vision that humankind can and will be transformed by the love of God.

One of the wonders in life is that at times the invisible becomes visible. We call such moments visions or apparitions or appearances. Some are more well known

than others, like the appearances of Mary at Lourdes, at Fatima, and at Guadeloupe. John O'Donohue in his book *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*, wrote: "The dead are not distant or absent. They are alongside us. When we lose someone to death, we lose their physical image and presence, they slip out of visible form into invisible presence. This alteration of form is the reason we cannot see them. But because we cannot see them does not mean they are not there. Transfigured into eternal form, they cannot reverse the journey and even for one second re-enter their old form to linger with us a while. Though they cannot reappear, they continue to be near us and part of the healing of grief is the refinement of our hearts whereby we come to sense their loving nearness....."

One day as a young woman while participating in a procession on Holy Rosary Sunday, Marguerite gazed upon a small statue of Mary and strongly felt her gaze being fully returned to her — as she gazed so Mary gazed upon her and Marguerite awoke to a new way of being — a new way of seeing. She awoke to a New Self that she did not recognize. (Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, page 163)

It felt like a dream, but not like a dream. Real, yet so unreal. Marguerite began to ponder deep within her being:

What am I to do?
How am I to live?
Where am I to go?
Where is this new reality now leading me?

Her inner desire was to live a life dedicated to God. A life lived with compassion and love for all she met. This became her dream, not only for herself, but for all of humankind. "It is true that all I have ever desired most deeply and what I still most ardently wish is that the great precept of the love of a God above all things and of the neighbour as oneself be written in every heart. O, if I could only engrave it in my own heart and in each of my sisters, I would have reached the fulfillment of my desires." (Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, page 187.)

She tried the convent but the answer was NO — that's not where I want you to be, I have other things in store for you. So she continued teaching the poor children of Troyes, but with new eyes and a new heart to see them as they truly are — beloved children of her God.

The seed has now been planted and is beginning to grow. Marguerite is starting to respond to that call, that longing deep within her, to become who she was born to be.

Marguerite continued to grow in her new reality, pondering what she was truly being called to be. As she moved deeper into her centre, her acts of compassion, kindness, and self emptying, she found herself drawn closer and closer to Mary, who became her companion and guide on her road to becoming.

One day Marguerite was approached by Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve asking her if she would consider joining them, as a teacher, in their efforts to establish a settlement that would be a model of a Christian society, located in the New World at a place called Ville Marie, on the island of Montreal.

Immediately the questions began, Go —don't go. Leave everything— don't leave. Stay — don't stay. Is this what God is now asking of me? There is so much for me to do here. Am I to leave all those whom I am working for and working with?

Marguerite turned to prayer and once again one of those sacred moments took place and she saw a tall woman dressed in a robe of white serge saying very clearly, "Go, I will never forsake you." And she knew it was the Blessed Virgin, assuring her and giving her the courage to pronounce her yes to what was being asked of her at this moment.

So Marguerite began to take the next step on her journey into the fullness of her being. In February 1653, she set sail for the New World. The journey was not easy and she found herself caring for the sick and the needy. She continued to ponder, and to ask, "is this how I am called to live?". Her compassionate heart poured out for all of her companions on the journey.

As Marguerite continued to grow in an awareness of who she was, she also grew in an awareness of the sacredness of her being. A sacredness that found expression in her kind-full, loving care, and concern for the wellbeing of others. She found herself growing in an awareness of the sacred within all that is, and that life itself is sacred. She began to understand that material reality and spiritual reality are indeed one and the same.

Arriving in Ville Marie, she immediately set herself to looking after the needs of this floundering community, beginning by restoring the cross that had been erected on Mount Royal, taking on the challenge of building a chapel in honour of Mary, and converting an unused stable into a school house and a home.

While working at restoring the cross another sacred moment occurred for Marguerite. She found the banner that had been placed there by de Maisonneuve

when it was first erected on January 6, 1643 in thanksgiving for having survived the threat of being flooded out before they even began. The inscription on it read: "Holy Mother of God, pure Virgin with a royal heart, keep us a place in your Montreal." These words were a confirmation for Marguerite that her life up until now was a preparation for her presence here in Ville Marie and the place that Mary had been saving was for her. A moment of grace, a moment of deepening awareness of who she was and who she was called to be.

Despite many setbacks and obstacles on every side Marguerite showed her patience and endurance. She had faith in the vision of who she was called to be, in the spirit active in the core of her being, and in her faithful guide and companion Mary, she continued her life of serving the people she had grown to love and cherish.

As more people arrived to live in Ville Marie the need for a school became apparent and in 1658 Marguerite received a building that was a former stable for her use. She involved the people and mainly the children in the cleaning and converting this stable into a school. Involving others was a means of creating a bond between them, forming a stronger sense of community.

Taking residence in the stable school had a significant impact on Marguerite. Just as Mary before her gave birth to Jesus in a stable, and there she received Shepherds and kings with the same love, so too, here in the stable in Ville Marie, something new was being born that would be the hope for the future of this community, a community based on the principles of compassion, of love, and of justice for all. Marguerite was filled with awe and wonder at the life she was now living, a life so closely united to her companion, her guide and mentor, Mary.

As the colony continued to grow in numbers the time came when Marguerite found the need to find some people to assist her in the school. So she returned to Troyes where she was able to recruit four young women to join her in Ville Marie.

Through the return trip and sharing their lives together at the stable a strong bond was being formed between them and the beginning of a sense of community was taking form. The seed planted early in her youth⁽¹⁾ was starting to take root and it would continue to grow and flower at a later date.

(1) WMB page 162

The path Marguerite is walking is one of conscious involvement. It is one of personal lived reality of conscious involvement, involving all of her self in every

aspect of her living. It is a path of extravagant generosity, mirroring to others what God is like, what love is like, what human life is like.

There is a poem by the Sufi poet Rumi that speaks so elegantly about what love is.

Love is reckless; not reason.
Reason seeks a profit.
Love comes on strong,
consuming herself, unabashed.

Yet, in the midst of suffering,
Love proceeds like a millstone,
hard surfaced and straightforward.

Having died of self-interest,
she risks everything and asks for nothing.
Love gambles away every gift God bestows.

Without cause God gave us Being;
without cause, give it back again.

Throughout Marguerite's life in Ville Marie every task she undertook, be it the building of the Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, caring for and teaching the children, welcoming the Kings Ward's and teaching them how to be good wives and mothers, establishing a farm, all was undertaken with a spirit of extravagant generosity. It was this spirit that gave her the courage to know who she was and what she was called to do, in spite of any obstacles and or opposition.

Extravagant generosity. What an awesome reality. God creates with extravagant generosity, giving of God's Self totally to the other, for the sake of the other. Paradoxically at the same time God also desires the other. God creates because God is Love and love is expressed with extravagant generosity — the total giving of oneself for the other with never counting the cost. A true dying to self — giving of self — losing of self — pouring out all that one is with extravagant generosity. Extravagant generosity is the path of God who squandered him/her self — gave it all away — poured all that God was and is into being, holding nothing back. It is a path that calls one to constantly giving oneself entirely onto.

Jesus lived a life of extravagant generosity. As he walked this path he was drawn deeper and deeper into his true humanity and his true divinity. A path that showed him a God who was his father, a loving, compassionate father, slow to anger and abounding in love. He walked a path that drew him deeply in the reality that our God is truly present with us. That the kingdom that all were longing for is present, here and now, in the hearts of all. He became deeply aware that the longing in the hearts of the people was a longing for redemption from the systemic evil of the world. A yearning for deliverance, a cry of those who have experienced and are now experiencing the tyranny of injustice and yet have hope. A path that deepened his awareness of all the injustices surrounding him and to respond. The victims were treated with compassion, with forgiveness, with healing, and with love. The perpetrators with the truth and a call to change their ways of being.

Mary also lived a life of extravagant generosity. Her yes brought into reality the incarnation — the living presence of God within all of creation.

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.
For you have blessed me,
a poor and humble servant.

Mary's extravagant generosity gave us her son, Jesus, to be our guide to living, to loving, to becoming who we are called to be. It allowed her to stand silently at the foot of his cross offering her tears for all the injustices that exist in the world for those that brought about this moment in time.

Marguerite had a great devotion to Mary, her mentor and guide, and when she was able to formalize her community within the church as the Congrégation de Notre-Dame she chose Mary and the life she lived to be the model for all the sisters to emulate. To live lives of extravagant generosity.

As the foundation of the rule for her community and indeed for everyone, she chose the one God gave from the beginning of creation.

The Rule for this community, and for everyone, is the one God gave from the creation of the world...“You shall love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.”

*This word has gone out **from all the Earth** for it is said that God will send forth His fire winging to the ends of the world...that all creatures - Angels, Humans, Animals,*

*Inanimate Objects will say each in their own tongue: "It is not we who have made ourselves, but God has given us being..." The Sun proclaims this truth, the smallest creatures repeat the same in a language which is mute to humans, but heard by their Creator that unless its Creator sustained it, it would fall back into nothingness...WMB
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“you shall love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.” Echoing again the spirit of Extravagant Generosity!

May this spirit of extravagant generosity residing in the core of our being draw each of us deeper into the truth of our being and find a voice in all that we say and do this day and all the days of our lives.