

HOW TO PONDER/PRAY A POEM

(The Spiritual Practice of Poetic “Divina”)

1. Read the poem a first time. As you read it, listen for the word or phrase that leaps out at you. What word or phrase calls to you or sticks in your memory? Pause after this first reading. Gently take the word or phrase into your heart space without questioning it.
2. Read the poem a second time. You might read it out loud to yourself this second time. Reflect on the word or phrase that speaks to you. Let it now interact with your thoughts. Consider any feelings that have arisen as you read the poem and focused on the word or phrase. How might the word or phrase be touching/inter-relating with your life today? Pause as you reflect and listen.
3. Read the text of the poem a last time. Is there a message here for you? How might the Divine be speaking to you through this poem? Spend a few moments in silence, opening to the message you might find in it waiting for you. Is there a prayer the Divine is offering you? Reflect and give thanks. Maybe note in writing what happened and anything from it you may want to hold for further prayer and reflection.

For this spiritual exercise you may want to use one of your favorites or one of Mary Oliver’s from our January 29th Epistle. Or the one below by Temple Cone.

“Some Questions about the Soul”

What does the soul weigh? Does it differ from person to person?

Does the kingfisher, rattling over the river, possess one?

What of the staghorn beetle? The Douglas fir? The Himalayas?

If I looked through the deepest microscope, could I find the oak

Coiled within the acorn? Could I find my own death within me?

Would it be fine-grained, like sharkskin, or jagged as the Himalayas?

From what are we saving daylight? Are there telephones in the grave?

Did Nijinsky remember his dances as a phantom limb feels ghost pain,

Or as a snow leopard considers the valleys far below the Himalayas?

Tell me, what fills the sleep of whales? Do they dream of their lost feet?

Of the empty air as they breach skyward and crash in fountains?

Do they look at us as we look at clouds scattered above the Himalayas?

Why is there no vocative case for god in Greek? If god is not a noun,

Is it a verb whose tenses we have not yet learned to master?

Is her skin godding the sunset? Do cranes god over the Himalayas?

Since Keats always began or ended his great odes with questions,

Should we assume he only found answers in the midst of life?

What does the soul weigh? As much as a flower? Or the Himalayas?