



THE MARK

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Volume 26
Number 10

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ♦ A Contemplative Christian Community



New Hearts

by Tim Cook

I once got an emergency call to go to Seton Hospital; a dear friend had just suffered a massive heart attack and was in surgery having a quadruple bypass. Like me, he had been a heavy drinker of alcohol and we shared both the experience of our love for God and our gratitude for having been rescued from the insanity of alcohol. Unlike me, however, Joe had not given up smoking and, in fact, had recently even been smoking several packs a day. His heart had given him numerous warnings that something wasn't right and his doctors had repeatedly urged him to give up smoking and he knew he should; but, like all of us do sometimes, he found these calls to better health easy to ignore and continued to smoke as if it didn't matter.

A couple days later when he was able to talk, he described his experience to me. He had been walking across his living room when he was suddenly struck by pain of unimaginable intensity. He fell to the floor, barely conscious, and slowly realized what happened. He knew he desperately needed help but the only phone was across the room and he couldn't get up. Slowly, he managed to slide himself

across the floor on his back inch by inch in a process that seemed to take forever. Unable to reach up to the phone on its table, he pulled on the cord until the phone fell to the floor. With his last bit of strength, he barely managed to slowly press the buttons, 9-1-1. Joe's next moment of consciousness came in the recovery room after surgery.

Later that day the surgeon who had saved his life came into the room with a video player, which he hooked up to the television set in the room. He proceeded to play a video recording of Joe's surgery for him. What followed was a moment of enlightenment for Joe because he told me, "When I saw him take my heart out of my chest and lay it in a pan on the table; that's when I knew it was serious."

He had been called to this awareness by many doctors, many times over many years, and his heart itself had called out to him through the painful warning symptoms it experienced. And he told me that he had known all along, in his heart, that he really should heed those calls; but that he just hadn't known that his situation was that serious until he saw the doctor remove his heart from his chest.

Our human condition is utterly serious. Our self-sense, our feeling of "I" of most of the human race is caught in an illusory dream of separation from God; a dream in which we keep reaching outside ourselves for satisfactions that can never be found there but only within. What a great example of our human capacity for denial of inconvenient truths. How dire do our circumstances have to get before we respond to the calls of love, wisdom and intelligence that come to us from both our world and our own deep interiority. God is always calling us; sometimes through the conditions and circumstances in our lives and sometimes as a call from that "still small voice" of the Divine within us.

Either way, we can be sure that God is always calling each of his human creations to come into a harmonious relationship with reality. Truth or reality is a serious affair and our relationship to it leaves us with a do-or-die responsibility to respond to the evidence that presents itself on every side. Denial only postpones the inevitable confrontation with reality and narrows the options for remedy. The human race has

heart problems and they are not going to go away without some serious changes.

It is easy to feel discouraged and overwhelmed by the enormity of the environmental, social, religious, political, economic, racial and martial problems that surround us on every side. But that is just another form of denial, “What does it matter what I do? I am just one tiny soul. I can’t affect the vast difficulties I see around me.” But each of us matters immensely. Each one of us is the human race in person, a living cell in the Body of Christ and each of us touches and influences countless others each and every day. A transformed you is the gift you give to the world and the most powerful witness any one of us can give to those around us of the reality of the God who is love.

We’ve been practicing and rehearsing the world’s way of seeing, acting and doing all our lives. Practicing God’s way of Life transforms us and transforms the world we share with those whose lives touch ours. And just one person can make an enormous change in the world through his own transformation. The perfect example is Paul, one small man who

said, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” His change helped change the world.

Christ actually gives each of us a heart transplant. He takes away our old, stony, self-bound hearts and gives us instead His own merciful, compassionate, God-devoted heart. How this happens is a mystery. That it happens can be personally experienced by anyone who sees the situation of the human race seriously enough to wish to do her or his part in the maturation of our species.

God has been calling the human race to reality for countless ages and we live in an age that can answer. One by one, we answer God’s eternal call and take our places in the vast Oneness of our Creator’s Presence. We get that it is serious, more serious than we thought, and we open ourselves to the Great Heart Transplant.

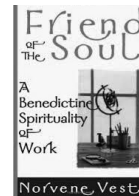
The exchange of Christ’s heart for ours does not happen all at once but as a process, empowered and stabilized by our daily practice and our life together in spiritual community.

How blessed we are to have heard God’s call. How blessed we are when we answer. ☺

CCH Bookstore

October reading suggestions

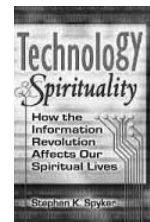
Friend of the Soul
A Benedictine Spirituality of Work
by Norvene Vest



Work With Meaning, Work With Joy
Bringing Your Spirit to Any Job
by Pat McHenry Sullivan



Technology & Spirituality
How the Information Revolution
Affects Our Spiritual Lives
by Stephen K. Spyker



Mind and Energy
Compiled from Meetings Notes
by Beryl Pogson

Bookstore and Library Hours
Monday-Friday 9 am-3:30 pm
Sunday 9-10 am & 11:30 am-12:30 pm

Vocation of the Sacred

by Barbara Cook

“All that we do then serves Him.
That is our vocation.”

As I was pondering the idea of vocation, what came to me is the vocation of the Christian, to become Christ or rather to let Christ become him or her. In our Baptism, we go under the waters to signify our dying to self and rising into Christ, a child of God. It seems preposterous to our mental ego, that our calling would be that; but to the soul or spirit within us, it is quite obvious that there is more to a human life than buying and selling, getting and having, etc. Jesus himself came to reveal what that “more-to-life” looks like and so invites us to pick up our crosses, to die to the self daily and to follow him in the regeneration of mankind.


And he gave us the instruction manual in the beautiful fifth chapter of the book of Matthew. The Beatitudes are the “how to” for how to die to self; go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, bless those that curse us, and pray for those that spitefully use you, and so on. From a worldly point of view it seems all backwards; but for someone who is answering Jesus’

call to become his brother, it is the key for learning how to diminish self; so Christ in us can grow.

We know that each time we do our Centering Prayer, we are dying to ourselves. We are not letting our little selves have their usual way, which keeps the false self active and predominate. When we sit still, and just show up and commit to staying still for 20 to 30 minutes, is the way we die to self twice a day, every day. If we add a 10-day retreat every year, we accelerate the process. We decrease. Christ increases. Our vocation grows, slowly and over time.

Not to be mistaken as some far-fetched idea dreamed up by a mad theologian, Buddhists also believe that the earthly vocation of man is the Dharma, the Way of spiritual transformation. Then everything in life is seen as “small d” dharmas, which contribute to the principal transformative vocation. These would include the idea of right livelihood, right relationships, meditation, marriage and other aspects of ordinary life.

Each Christian is invited to be a Christophany, a shining forth of Christ in the world. That requires us to hunger for it and to seek it within, where Christ can be found. Christ in us gradually diminishes our self-centered life and replaces it with his Presence. All that we do then serves Him. That is our vocation.

Jesus told us that if we seek the Kingdom of God all else will be added. In faith, we trust that promise and dive into our vocation by letting go of selfish ways at every opportunity. Then we will see with God’s eyes. We will see his sacred world and wish to serve it, serving Christ through Christ. This is possible in our lifetime, if it is what we want and wish. May it be so. 




There is Nothing Better

Lord, what do you want me to do? Acts 9:6

God's action is boundless in its scope and power, but it can only fill our souls if we empty them of all false confidence in our own ability. This false confidence can check the activity of God within us. God can, when he pleases, change all other obstacles into aids for spiritual progress. For, to him, everything is the same, equally useful or equally useless. Without him everything is nothing, and with him nothing is everything. We may meditate, indulge in contemplation, pray aloud, practice interior silence, live an active life or one withdrawn from the world, and though they may all be valuable, there is nothing better for us than to do what God wants at any particular moment. ... We must not pick and choose. We must say: "I will do everything you wish. My mind wants to do one thing, my body another, but, Lord, I want to do nothing but obey your holy will. Work or every kind of prayer, vocal or mental, active or passive, are all nothing unless your will gives them meaning. All my devotion is to your holy will, not for

the things of this world, however grand and noble they are, for grace is given to us because of the love in our hearts and not for any outstanding qualities of our minds."

What makes us holy is the presence of God through the dwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the depths of our hearts when we give them up to God's will. Now, contemplation produces this close union of us with God, as indeed do other acts, provided, of course, that they are part of God's plan for us. Yet contemplation stands supreme, for it is the most effective means of achieving this union, if God wills it.

So we are quite right to love contemplation and all other pious acts, with the clear understanding that this love is really focused on the God of all goodness, who wants us to use every means that will unite us with him. If we entertain a prince, we naturally entertain him and his court. He would be insulted if we neglected his attendants with the excuse that we wanted to honor only him. 

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, translated by John Beevers, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, pages 29-30. Caussade was an eighteenth-century French Jesuit priest, professor and spiritual director. He succeeded in keeping worldly affairs at arm's length and making use of them towards his life's passion—the adoration of God and concern for our eternal well-being. He focused on the necessity of loving God and surrendering ourselves to Him completely. But he said we need not do extraordinary works, nor show unique devotion, nor behave in an uncommon manner. All we must do is our Christian duty continually.



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God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good. Genesis 1:31

Annual Aim: A Sacred World

Soundings of Conscious Harmony

Vocation by Stephen Utts

What is a vocation?
A call and a response.
... but it is only true
after a long interior struggle
... a process of maturing ...
a mysterious way of dying
... a dizzying choice ...
by which the certitude
gained of being called is torn asunder.
That which consecrates
a vocation and raises it
to the height of the sacrifice
that it becomes,
is a breaking
with the apparent
order of being.

Thomas Merton, *The Intimate Merton*

*It was not you who chose me,
but I who chose you and appointed you
to go and bear fruit that will remain.*

John 15:16

“There is only one vocation. Whether you teach or live in the cloister or nurse the sick, whether you are in religion or out of it, married or single, no matter who you are or what you are, you are called to the summit of perfection: you are called to a deep interior life perhaps even to mystical prayer, and to pass the fruits of your contemplation to others. And if you cannot do by word, then by example.” Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*

It is the last campus tour on a beautiful warm summer day in Boulder. We have seen the last gleaming student “rec” center with its towering climbing wall and rows of treadmills, the digital libraries, and expansive green lawns. Tom is tired, but I want more. “We should really go to the optional breakout session from the school of engineering.” He’ll have nothing of it. So reluctantly, I call it a day. I’m probably not unlike many of the other parents. We seem more interested than our kids and we are the ones asking the questions. We know there is something special

about a college campus. It is a place and time dedicated to education and preparation for independent life with a fresh empty slate to write upon.

Tom and Lilly, our high school seniors, have seen several campuses over the past year, and I suspect it generates as much anxiety for them as nostalgia and attraction for me. I envy them. They are on the cusp of their first taste of independence. They are beginning a journey of self-discovery and growth. They get to discover how they will contribute to the world. And they will find their first vocation.

But as I reflect on my own journey – from undergraduate to medical school, residency, Air Force fellowship in gastroenterology, starting a practice in Austin and then co-founding a large specialty group – I would not want to repeat that journey again. Now I am in the last few years of my first vocation and I want something more. Although medical practice can be at times gratifying, we have developed such efficiency that it is a machine and I am one of its cogwheels. We are judged by our production and our adenomatous polyp detection rates. The art of medical practice is beaten down by rules of procedure and diagnosis codes, Medicare and hospital regulations, and hundreds of signatures per day. There are occasional bursts of creative energy as a physician, but I mostly find creativity outside my profession, as a Boy Scout leader, softball coach, Godly Play teacher and by shearing our alpacas. So as much as I envy our teens, I would not want to go back and do the first vocation again. I long for a fresh beginning and a new journey of discovery. One that I believe we are all called to do.

It's timely that I just reread Father Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward*, which speaks to this journey. He writes:

“A journey into the second half of life awaits us all. Not

everybody goes there, even though all of us get older, some of us get older than others. A “further journey” is a well kept secret for some reason”

Rohr continues:

“The task of the first half of life is to create a proper *container* for one's life and answer the first essential questions: “What makes me significant?” “How can I support myself” and “Who will go with me?” The task of the second half of life is, quite simply, to find out the actual *contents* that this container was meant to hold and deliver.”

The concerns of the first half are meant to give way to “homesickness” for meaning, universality, gravitas and wisdom. It requires openness to letting go of station and prestige. If I can embrace this openness, the second half can emerge, but it will require facing some loss and humility and a passive acceptance of God's ultimate role for me. This is much more difficult than engaging the more linear requirements of the first half. I will soon be facing the “choiceless choices” that ask me to try to discern, often with much struggle, God's will for me. Embarking on this less charted path will require courage.

Maurice Nicoll, in his

commentaries alludes to the second half of life calling as follows:

“He often disappears after having done his duty. Such a man often vanishes. He may have gone into a monastery or he may have gone elsewhere to find out something different from life. Such a man, if he does this, may find something that makes it possible for him to develop.”

The theme for this month, “Vocation,” has both a modern, more secular meaning and an older and more profound meaning. Today, we often think of it in terms of vocational school or vocational counseling. The shift in meaning is reflected in the work of a progressive social reformer Frank Parsons, who in 1908, published “Choosing a Vocation” to help those seeking a better life through conscious education to a new career. A laudable idea and certainly relevant for many entering the first half of life, but it has now become emblematic for our “first half of life only” culture.

Almost forgotten is vocation defined as a divine calling that few hear, but in a broader way, this is the disposition required for the second half of life. For those spiritual guides who have been on this path for most of their lives, this is the only vocation they know. In Thomas Merton's abridged diary, *The Intimate*

Merton, the word vocation comes up 78 times. In Merton's world, this is the *only* definition of vocation. The ear of his heart was always bent to the call of the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the very moving DVD *Thomas Keating, A Rising Tide of Silence*, there is a passage about letting go. Father Thomas grew up in a privileged household of a prominent lawyer, and "let go of that." He was Abbott of Spencer and "let go of that," Superior at Snowmass and "let go of that," and now a well-known spiritual teacher who is "letting go of that." His life is a great example of letting go and humbly seeking God's call, God's invocation. It has been a journey not without pain, suffering or humility.

So, at this stage of life, it can be terrifying to let go of all that had been achieved, but the promise of greater unity can be so compelling that I think my terror can be overcome.

Then the next concern arises: wondering whether I am responding to God's will or my own. How can I discern this? I first must consent and be willing to embrace an authentic struggle.

"To conceive the call of God as an expressed order is not always false, but it is only true after a long interior struggle." Merton entered this in his diary two weeks before his death in Bangkok.

In the *Mystery of Christ*, Father Keating speaks of the struggle with discernment.

"The double bind does not consist in the choice between what is obviously good and obviously evil. That is temptation ... but knowing which is good and which is evil. The dilemma may arise in another form: one cannot decide which of two apparent goods is God's will. For a delicate conscience, this causes deep trouble. People on the spiritual journey regularly find themselves in such double binds, which may even become more searching (and transforming) as the journey proceeds."

So Kathy and I are at the crossroads. We are launching our children into the world of self-discovery and independence as we empty the nest and "let go of that." I am winding down my role as a physician to "let go of that." I enter into this new beginning with a new sense of mystery and required humility while letting go again and again. This, to me, is the true meaning of vocation. To use a hiking metaphor, "retirement" is "kicking back" at base camp after a successful career, but the full experience is the climb from "base

camp" to the peak hidden in the clouds. I pray to have the courage to head on up there. Fortunately, I have the companionship of great teachers and a great community of contemplative seekers through The Church of Conscious Harmony.

Nothing expresses it better than this excerpt from Merton's *Thoughts in Solitude*

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.


Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." 

Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.

Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of Lectio Divina.

One principle will appear in these pages each month

3rd Guideline



God and our true Self are not separate.

Though we are not God,

God and our true Self are the same thing.

SEEDS

Our vocation is not simply to *be*, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny.

We are free beings and sons of God.

This means to say that we should not passively exist, but actively participate in His creative freedom, in our own lives, and in the lives of others, by choosing the truth.

To put it better, we are even called to share with God the work of *creating* the truth of our identity.

We can evade this responsibility by playing with masks, and this pleases us because it can appear at times to be a free and creative way of living.

It is quite easy, it seems, to please everyone.

But in the long run the cost and the sorrow come very high.

To work out our own identity in God, which the Bible calls, "working out our salvation," is a labor that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears.

It demands close attention to reality at every moment, and great fidelity to God as He reveals Himself, obscurely, in the mystery of each new situation.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, page 119.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Visit consciousnessharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Oct 18

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a brown bag lunch

Oct 25

Intro to Centering Prayer Course
8:30 am-3:30 pm, then
6 consecutive Mondays 7:30pm
\$75 Pre-register with the office

MONTHLY

1st Sundays

Bring non-perishable items for Caritas

Oct 21

Gurdjieff Music 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays

Lectio Divina 8-9 am
Worship Service 10-11:30 am
Youth Program 10-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am-noon

Wednesdays

Prayer Circle 9:15-10 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays

Work of Inner Christianity Class 7:30-9 pm

Fridays

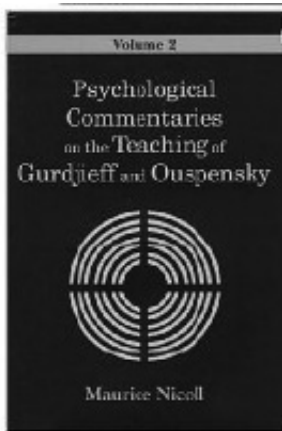
Devotional Service 7:30-8:45 pm

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am

Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available
through the Bookstore and online at
www.consciousnessharmony.org



The Work of Inner Christianity

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

The Second Education

When a man is in great danger he may feel that everything round him is unreal. He ceases to identify through his senses with external phenomena. The same thing may happen when a man is very ill. His spirit is withdrawn from participation in the evidence of the inflow of the senses. In other words, he feels that he is different, momentarily, from the external world and all the hypnotic powers of the continually changing events that have hitherto taken all his force. All this shows us that there is something different from ordinary relationship to people, to things, to events. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—these special states of consciousness pass and we find ourselves once more in the clang and clatter of life, rushing about, quarrelling, being offended, and being miserable. ... Man has to undergo two educations. The Work says that Man must first be educated in life and make a reasonable adaptation to life so that he can reasonably meet the difficulties that exist on this planet. This is called the formation of a good, and, if

possible, rich Personality, and if people do not form this they are always weak and rather a nuisance to the Work. Of course, one can learn a lot of things in the Work as regards dealing with life, apart from what one has learnt before, so one gets a better Personality. ... One can learn to cook, one can learn to paint, and so on. Then the Work speaks about the second education. Since Man is born a self-developing organism ..., he requires another education to develop this possibility ... to become ... a complete Man, ... the nature of the second education is living and practicing in yourself the Work-teaching, beginning with Self-Remembering and with the idea that you must observe yourself, that you must stop identifying, you must stop negative emotions, and all the rest of it. *This is the second education.* If I had known in my early days that negative emotions were useless I should have known a great deal that might have helped me. The trouble is that people must have the teaching of this Work constantly shown to them, be constantly reminded of it,


to see what they have got to do in this second education that we are studying. But it is no good hearing about the teaching of this Work—that is, the second education—unless you have fulfilled up to a reasonable point your first education, and, as was said, your first education is to be able to make a reasonable adaptation to existing circumstances so that you can make a living or something like that. Your Personality is that which adapts you to life. If you have a very badly developed Personality, which you acquired from contact with life or life-teachers, you will always be a weak man or a weak woman. Why? Simply because you cannot do anything. You try to boil an egg in cold water without turning on the gas or you try to fry an egg without putting any fat in the pan—doesn't this mean a very poor adaptation to external phenomena?

Now through observation of oneself one sees these gaps and stupidities that exist in our Personalities that are acquired from education in life. That is why I say that it is necessary to have as rich

There Lies Our Whole Vocation

... Poor brother, who thinks he is forgotten and is not forgotten at all, but who himself forgets that the memory that lies in the heart cannot always express itself outwardly, and that the number of unexpressed things far exceeds those that are expressed. The Carthusian life rests upon a deep foundation of silence which you know and love, and it is in that depth that the Eternal Word is born for each one of us. There lies our whole vocation: to listen to Him

Who generates the Word and to live thereby. The Word proceeds from Silence, and we strive to find Him in His Source. This is because the Silence here in question is not a void nor a negation but, on the contrary, Being at Its fullest and most fruitful plenitude. That is why It generates; and that is why we keep silent. I read somewhere that books are of more value for what they do not say than for what they do. The reader is like a man gazing at a horizon. Beyond


the outlines that he sees, he seeks perspectives he barely discerns, but which draw him precisely because of the mystery he senses in them. So the books one loves are those which make one think. One seeks in them that silence whence the words were born, which is those depths of the soul which no language can express, for they are beyond expression. It is here we touch what is measureless, eternal and divine in us. 

A Carthusian, *They Speak by Silences*, pages 5-6.

The Work continued from page 10

a Personality as possible for this Work. O. said in so many words: "It is necessary to have as many impressions as possible laid down in rolls in different centers. The more that is laid down in these rolls, the richer your Personality." Now, as you know, or perhaps you have observed, some people live in very tiny little Personality. ... This simply means that they have very few rolls in centers that have received impressions. A man, a woman, approaching this Work should have a lot of impressions in many different rolls in different centers. Otherwise the material is

too weak, too small, too limited. Now, to return to what I was saying, in the second education Man has to move in the full direction belonging to his creation and *that is to do this Work*. He must study this Work, he must think about what it teaches, and he must try to practice it. For example, at every moment, whether you are in the Work or out of it, you will meet with difficult situations, situations that, so to speak, catch fire. In this Work, if you are in this Work, you must put out the flames that might spread. How? By doing this Work, whatever the situation may be. You must first of all remember

yourself, because if you identify with an unpleasant situation you will be negative, and negative emotion is like petrol thrown over an event. I mean, everything blazes up. Once you begin to see that you are responsible for not letting things catch fire, you will begin to understand something of what the second education means. You will begin to realize that it has to do with the creation of another reality within you that is stronger than external reality. 

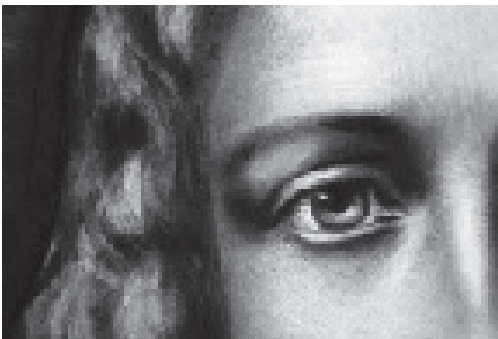
Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 1380-1382. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.



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*Blessed are they who hunger
and thirst for holiness;
they shall have their fill.*

Matthew 5:6

Ordinary Time

The primary sacrament of Christianity is Jesus Himself.

A sacrament is a visible sign
of the invisible presence of grace;
it communicates and transmits what it signifies.

Jesus transmitted what He signified,
divine love, by His teaching and example.

... After Jesus,
the greatest sacrament
is another human being.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*