

## Conference: Ch. 7 on *12 Steps to Inner Freedom*

### To Live in God's Presence

Who, among us, isn't here because we want to live more in God's presence?

We're looking for Benedict to show us the way of realizing God's presence in our lives – since God is *always* present to us

In this book (hold up), Chittister describes *her* 12 steps to spiritual development (*not* the 12 steps of humility)

She writes: “Benedict teaches us that the most important step of spiritual life lies in recognizing the presence of God”

She, then, writes that 2 things are crucial to realizing that presence:

- accepting others the way that they are
- being centered & serene

#### A. Accepting others the way they are – what does this require?

1) accepting others requires us to depend on our relationships with others

“no man is an island unto himself” – we *need* others ...

esp. to grow with our mind, body, & spirit – this development cannot be done in isolation

Chittister writes that others have a sanctifying place in our lives – we can always learn from them – even if it is “what *not* to do”

2) Accepting others requires us to respect & honor others – in spite of their warts & flaws

Even if we don't agree w/them politically – or feel that they have done some really bonehead things

Jesus said, “... you shall love others as yourself”

We're *not* asked to respect the *actions* & *words* of others – but, we are expected to want what God wants for others as human beings

God wants for others – the honor & respect due to all other human beings

We are to respect others because they, like us, are made in the image of God

Q: how do you honor/respect others who are odious to you? (for me, it helps me to understand them – or “there, but for the grace of God, go I”)

How do we come to respect & honor others – if we don’t respect ourselves?

if we don’t love ourselves, we might look for a spiritual director &/or a therapist – it’s too deep of a topic to get into tonight

3) So, accepting others requires self-examination & self-understanding of *ourselves*

The church specifically provides ways to enable the self-examination – thru Lent & Advent, thru lists of questions. We can also find sources for self-examination in the 10 Commandments & in our Baptismal vows.

By prayerfully examining ourselves & thru prayer, we can come to a fuller understanding of ourselves, why we feel & act the way that we do, & what our childhood baggage does to us & others.

Q: how have you come to accept yourself? Does it help you to accept others easier?

4) Accepting others requires seeing Christ in others

Q: what does that mean? How can we do that?

Seeing Christ in others is why monastics bow to others

### B. Attaining Serenity & Calm & personal Simplicity

Goes a long way toward recognizing the presence of God in our lives

Serenity seems to be a most elusive quality for many people

I have found that, for me, it means to *slow down* - & not try to do too much in a day

I’m often reminded of the hubris (overreaching) of Adam & Eve in the Garden, when they wanted to be God - it’s not something that God desires for us humans

Some of us really love life - & really like to do all the things we want to cram into our days

But, sometimes, *all* those things become “too much”

That’s often when we don’t *feel* serene, calm, at peace - & when we don’t *feel* serene, we probably don’t present a peaceful presence to the world

Q: what are some ways that you attain serenity?

It's hard to be calm & serene when life gets too complex → when our lives get too complex, then it's time to realize importance of simplicity

### C. Cultivate Simplicity

Read p. 78-79 re assumptions about people & God

Benedict teaches the *opposite* of: people are complicated & God is obvious

Q: do you agree & why?

Living in this culture, our lives become easily complicated – “simple” is a word that many of us do not use to describe our lives

But, our lives can get unnecessarily complicated – yet, we thrive on it

For example, we buy “stuff” that takes a lot of time to use & maintain on our part

If it seems to be gobbling up way too much of our time, or our priorities have changed, we have some discernment to do

If we decide to simplify & let it go – we may discover that that decision was transformative for us

The more “stuff” we have – the more complex life is for us – yet, the more addictive it is

It takes TIME to maintain ourselves & our “stuff” (think electronic gadgetry) – even if we are using “labor-saving” devices ...

Because these complex things have allowed us to cram more into our lives

The more we simplify – the more time we have – for God, for others, for ourselves

We may grow & mature in ways that we hadn't thought possible

This is some of what is meant by the expression: **being in the presence of God is transformative!**

At least, when we weigh complexity & simplicity in the balance – time, stress, passionate interests – there are many factors to be considered

It's not just that Benedict feels that simplicity is important – after all, we can't simply swap 21<sup>st</sup> century life for 7<sup>th</sup> century life ...

But, simplicity *can* offer us more time:

- more time to be in relationship with God
- more time to be of service to others
- more time to develop & grow, personally & spiritually

#### **D. Conclusion**

Read Q's from discussion book