

Peace: Growing the Field

Corrie van den Bosch MSS

My peace lily has been flowering for weeks, gracing my living room with its peaceful stillness. Each bloom faces outwards, so that the whole sends out its peace in every direction. As I silently contemplate it, I find myself becoming still. My inner clutter and busyness subside. I am drawn into its peace and I, too, become a centre of peace in our world, the world which so desperately desires peace that it makes war to obtain it.



In her January CEN reflection, Madeline Duckett proposed that we take as our focus for this year the theme *Peace: Growing the Field*. That is what the peace lily is doing: simply by being what it is it creates a *field of peace* around itself.

When I think of a field, what comes to mind is a lush green area of grass or grain or some other crop, destined to feed animals including human ones. Psalm 23 (22) sings:

Fresh and green are the pastures where (God) gives me repose.

Green pastures evoke a sense of wellbeing, of abundance.

Hildegard of Bingen, that great medieval woman mystic, teacher, artist, prophet, healer, writer, musician and much more, was a Benedictine nun. Her monastery was set in the lush green of the Rhine valley. For her, that greenness was a sign of God's life-giving presence within creation. She invented a word for this, *veriditas*, which Matthew Fox translates as *greening-power*. She writes about the Divine Word as being *all verdant, greening, all creativity*. She also sees the Holy Spirit as *Veriditas*, the greening-power within all living things, making them grow, expand and celebrate, as they were intended to since the beginning of creation. She writes:

In the beginning all creatures were green and vital; they flourished amidst flowers. Later the green figure itself came down.

Matthew Fox comments: "Thus Jesus is called Greenness Incarnate".¹

As I understand Hildegard, the greenness of fields and forests spoke to her of the living, life-giving presence of God permeating and surrounding all that is. It is like an energy field, the ever-present Divine Impulse within all being and in creation as a whole, enabling it to flourish and grow into its full potential.

What happens when we take the lens through which Hildegard looked at the greenness of her surrounding and focus it on peace? Can we say that peace is like an energy field, the ever-present Divine Impulse enveloping and permeating every being, enabling it to grow into its full potential as a centre of Divine Peace? In order to do this, we need to enlarge our understanding of peace.

¹ Fox, Matthew, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, Bear & Company, Santa Fe NM, 1985



In our Christian tradition, we are celebrating Easter, the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. Risen from death, he visits his disciples and greets them, *Peace be with you*, a greeting he repeats as he breathes the Holy Spirit on them and sends them out to continue the mission he had begun during his earthly life (*John 20:19-23*). Like

their master, they were to reach out to everyone, and especially to those whom society excludes. Everyone is welcome in the community of Jesus, the *community of empowerment*,² in which each member is enabled to become all she or he potentially is and, in turn, similarly enables others.

As is to be expected, when we cut across the social structures of society, with its hierarchies of authority and power, the powers-that-be are threatened, just as they were in Jesus' own day. That's why they wanted him dead. The early disciples also met resistance; they were persecuted, imprisoned and many of them were put to death. The same still happens today in many parts of the world. Does that mean the peace, that gift of the Spirit which Jesus bestowed on his followers has failed them? No, it did not fail them. Rather, it enabled them to face suffering and even death with courage and serenity.

The peace Jesus conferred on his disciples in the gift of the Holy Spirit is not simply absence of war and conflict. The Jewish understanding of peace, *shalom*, is much richer in meaning. It refers to an inner sense of rightness, of wholeness, of wholesomeness and wellbeing. It is *veriditas*, the greening power Hildegard wrote about. More than a quality of being, the peace bestowed by Jesus is the living Spirit within us, communicating peace just by its presence, making us centres of peace, individually and as communities. The Spirit of Peace enables us to meet with serenity and confidence whatever happens on the surface of life and relationships.



If the Spirit's presence of peace is to fulfil its promise in and through us, we have a part to play. We need to welcome it and consciously nurture it. We nurture it by seeking to see all peoples with eyes of love, even those we don't naturally like, or are not naturally drawn to, those who ignore us or perhaps see us as enemies. Peace flourishes in a heart that has learnt to love all God created with the same love with which God loves them, a heart always ready to do its bit for the best of the other, so that all can flourish into the fullness for which God destined them. In the words of Jesus:

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (*John 10:10*).

² Diarmuid O'Murchū in his recent books and lectures speaks about the kingdom of God as the 'community of empowerment'.

There is a price to pay in nurturing the Spirit's gift of peace in us: it requires us to put aside our inclinations to meet like with like, anger with anger, violence with violence. When another hurts me, I want them to know it; the spontaneous impulse can be to hurt them in return. I need to recognise such reactions in myself. It faces me with my own capacity for violence. When I can own that in myself, it enables me to understand people who react to suffering by causing similar suffering to others.

The price of nurturing the Spirit's gift of peace is, in the words of Jesus:

I lay down my life for my sheep (John 10:13),



It is to place the other's wellbeing ahead of my own. It does not mean that we don't care for our own wellbeing, but we put the other's first. It takes a big heart to live such love consistently. As we do, the Spirit's presence of peace will flourish in us, will radiate out from us, becoming a *Field of Peace*. It

enables us to forgive those who wrong us, to work for reconciliation where there is conflict, division, misunderstanding or estrangement, etc. The Spirit of Peace becomes a quality of our own being, permeating all we do and extending to all we meet. We become oases of peace in our families, in our communities and in our troubled world, welcoming others into its peace, making all things whole and wholesome. This is the mission of people of peace and of growing the *Field of Peace*.

In our daily contemplative hour, we, members of the Contemplative Evolution Network, consciously join our individual oasis of peace to that of our fellow contemplatives wherever they may be, thus growing the *Field of Peace*. We believe that, as together we intentionally extend the *Field of Peace* to envelop our world, we join a vast network of people doing the same within their particular traditions, communities or networks. Thus, together we grow the *Field of Peace* for the healing, wholeness and flourishing of our suffering world.

We believe that when enough of us commit to such contemplation, the world itself will experience a change in consciousness and discover that the way of peace can guide us to resolve all conflict in ways in which everyone benefits. When that happens, the world will truly experience Easter, the new life and peace of the resurrected Christ.