

Ask – Earth Herself Will Answer Us

In today's Gospel reading we hear Jesus say, "I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

What would you ask in these crazy days in which we find ourselves? What do you seek? Where would you knock?

I enjoyed listening to the recorded talk that Margaret Wheatley gave at LCWR this year. I always enjoy her, and because I was lucky enough to be part of the liturgies at the DLC meeting in San Rafael in 2003, I had the opportunity to hear her there. What struck me then and what I hear again from her now is that she sees that **we** have the gifts, resources, and skills that are needed in these crazy days. After all, we have been faithfully asking and faithfully seeking and faithfully knocking for many, many years. Most of you here heard her say, "If you want it done, ask a nun."

Of course Margaret was talking about something much more profound than just getting things done – which we do pretty well. She referred to the same practice that the other Pat Farrell did in her talk at LCWR. Pat suggested that we

- "must learn to be led and to listen deeply . . .
- to discover personal and communal processes for deep prayer and dialogue . . .
- to nurture contemplative spaciousness."

This isn't something we used to do. Oh yes, I've heard the stories about setting your veil behind you in the choir stall just right, so that you could sleep during meditation without your head bobbing. But truly, we are cultivating this gift of contemplative prayer now.

- Our Adrian sisters invited us to join them in "8 for 8" bringing our powerful silence to the cacophony of political voices whirling around us.
- I've just learned that the Sinsinawa sisters are coming together every Wednesday for a half hour of contemplative prayer at the Mound.
- Margaret Galiardi and Nancy Sylvester have been bringing their workshop, "Exploring, Exercising Contemplative Power . . . Transforming Consciousness," around the country.
- And recently when Nancy engaged in a conversation with OPWest and others in San Rafael, 55 of the sisters were inspired to commit to regular communal contemplative practice with the intention of healing divisions.
- We can go back to two years ago to San Antonio where most of the sisters who gathered for Dominican Women Afire made a commitment to contemplative prayer as well.
- And at the CDN it's been the practice to gather together before morning prayer for a half hour of morning meditation for several years now.

I believe that in our silence, something is germinating. We may not be able to see it yet, but it is alive and growing. Just listen. The tone of political discourse (I won't call it civil) has not improved. The polarization is loud and angry.

And I believe our presence in contemplative prayer changes things. You do too.
We are women of prayer. We believe it matters.

When I visited Gethsemane in Kentucky as a novice, I remember being told about a quote of some Trappist about the power of silence. Couldn't find it in Google, but I did come across this quote in one of the articles. It is from Swami Vivekananda:
Suppose a carriage is drawn down the hill by four powerful horses, and you are the rider in that carriage. It's so easy to go down the hill, but suppose you restrain the horses, hold back, and with such strength that the horses want to gallop, and there is the hill you're rolling down . . . but the carriage is standing still. Consider that as silence consider that as meditation.

In our silence, something is germinating.

So, if we want to find what is germinating, alive and growing, where would we seek?

Earth herself will answer us.

I wrote a little bit in *In the Loop* about my experience this summer of visiting

- with Christin Tomy who was doing ministry at the Eco-Justice Center,
- with the Korean Sister John who was living with the sisters in Amityvillee and interning at Homecoming Farm,
- and with the Benincasa Community who spend considerable time at Harmony Farm. (And by the way, you will be hearing from two of the members of Benincasa this afternoon, Karen Gargamelli and Laura Mogollon Lee.)

I walked away from those experiences certain that there is something about Earth herself. Ask, and we receive from her. Seek from her, and we will find.

Several years ago when I did vocation ministry, I visited with the Abiding Abbess, a Buddhist priest, of Green Gulch Farms just north of San Francisco. I noted how many young women and men they had among them, and she said that the reason was the farm. Now given our conversation and my thinking at the time, I thought that it was the “corporate ministry” – the farm – that they were able to plug young people into that was the key. That and the fact that it was grounded in a contemplative lifestyle. Kind of like the Benedictine “ora et labora.” I mused that we had rather let go of the structures of silence, and our young sisters often have to go “find a job.” So it can be difficult for them to root themselves with us.

But after seeing what farming – really being in touch with Earth has meant to Christin Tomy, who is a newly professed Sinsinawa Dominican and Sister John, the young Korean novice who was sent by her congregation to learn how the U.S. Sisters incorporate Earth’s story into our theology and lives, I am beginning to believe that Earth is key. There is something we and our newer members should ask and seek of Earth herself.

Could this be what Pope Francis means in *Laudato Si’? An integral ecology includes*

- *taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation,*
- *reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals,*
- *and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us,*
- *whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered.” (225)*

So.

- What do we ask?
- What do we seek?
- How do we support one another in the asking?
- And how can we seek and at the same time let go of our need to find answers?

I believe there is much more wisdom in resting in not knowing than we can ever find in searching for answers.

- How do we hold onto an attitude of not knowing as we grapple with planning for futures we can't see?
- How do we hold this attitude when we think about our archives, our budgets, our sponsored institutions?
- What about Climate Investment?
- How do we hold this when it feels like things are falling apart?
- How do we encourage our newer members and young adults to do the same?

Lots of questions! I am trusting that our guests Jamie, Karen and Laura will add a special perspective to this journey as they bring their experience as young adult Catholic women who are doing a lot of seeking and asking. I'm going to try really hard to not look for answers. Rather, I hope I can listen with openness.

I look forward to their questions.