**WISDOM FROM THE MONASTERY**

**The Practice of Stability**

*“When we commit to a place we are also deepening our relationship with the landscape that shapes us and the creatures and plants that inhabit our region – our home monastery. Deepen your commitment to learning about the place you live – the local birds, plants, animals. Finding out their names roots us more strongly in our sacred space.”* **Earth: Our Original Monastery by Christine Valters Paintner**

**Prayer Activity: Building Cairns**

* Go for a walk, with the intention to collect stones out in nature.
* Take some time to hold each one and get in touch with their shape and texture.
* Create a Cairn: Gaelic for human-made pile of stones that serves as a landmark for something sacred nearby.
* You might create cairns for sacred points along your favorite nature trail; on your home altar; on your deck, etc. Allow the stones to signify your own heart’s response to a sacred physical space for you.

**The Practices of Wonder, Enchantment, and Astonishment**

*“Ultimately, to live an enchanted life is to pick up the pieces of our bruised and battered psyches, and to offer them the nourishment they long for.”* **The Enchanted Life by Sharon Blackie**

**Prayer Activity: Contemplative Photography**

* Take a contemplative walk in nature where you pay attention to the signs of the season. Bring your camera with you.
* The call of the contemplative is to see all of life as gift and to receive graces with a sense of wonder and gratitude. As you walk, think of it as receiving photos along the way rather than just taking photos. The frame of the camera lens helps you to see in new ways and to reflect on what you have encountered. This is not about the quantity or quality of photos. It is a seeing in a new way.
* When you return home, allow some time to be with the images you received. What do they evoke in you? What do they have to say to you?

**The Practice of Gratitude**

*“Gratitude is a way of life that sees life as abundant. To live in such a way that we honor the gifts we have and let go of our striving for things beyond our reach.”* **Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness by Br. David Steindl-Rast**

**Prayer Activity: Gratitude Journal**

* At the end the day, honor the gifts you have received, rather than dwelling on where life came up short. In a Gratitude Journal, list five gifts your day brought you. Drift off to sleep in a Spirit of thanksgiving.
* Take the time at the end of each month to read through the gifts of the month. Savor them and offer prayers of thanksgiving. To multiply the Spirit of gratitude, you might want to let others know when you are including them in your Gratitude Journal.

**The Practice of Mutuality and Reverence**

*“I was sad one day and went for a walk; I sat in the field. A rabbit noticed my condition and came near. It often does not take more than that to help at times – to just be close to creatures who are so full of knowing, so full of love, that they don’t chat, they just gaze with their marvelous understanding.”* **A Rabbit Noticed My Condition by St. John of the Cross**

**Prayer Activity: Listening Presence**

* Give someone the gift of your contemplative listening presence. Invite this person on a slow meandering walk. Lounge on the back deck. Linger over dinner or a cup of tea. Etc.
* See if you can find a time that is open-ended without the limitations of other scheduled activities.
* Minimize distractions so you can really show up and pay attention.
* Try to listen deeply with your heart open to curiosity, wonder and surprise without a hidden agenda.
* Reverence the sacred in this person and honor what they reveal about the divine presence to you.

**The Practice of Lament**

*“Repressed pain gets projected onto the world around us and either causes more suffering or reinforces the sense of inaction many of us hold. When we create room for the pain to move through us, we create conditions for healing.”* **Earth: Our Original Monastery by Christine Valters Paintner**

**Prayer Activity: Writing a Psalm of Lament**

* Address to God: How do you call upon the Divine Presence – God?
* Complaint: What is your lament and cry of pain?
* Affirmation of Trust: Have you had an experience of God meeting you in your pain before? Draw on this memory to experience a sense of companionship in your grief.
* Petition: What is your deepest desire from God? What do you need most?
* Assurance of Being Heard: What do you need from God to feel heard?
* Vow of Praise: What can you offer to God on behalf of your longing?
* Hymn or Blessing: Is there something for which you can express gratitude or wonder or delight?

**The Practice of Ecstasy and Union**

*“And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.”* **Showings of Divine Love by St. Julian of Norwich**

**Prayer Activity: Contemplating the Hazelnut**

* Meditate with a hazelnut or something equally small from creation that you can hold in your hand.
* Find a quiet place and turn off all distractions. Allow yourself to fully arrive in this moment. Drop your awareness down into your heart center.
* Behold the object in your hand. Gaze at it with curiosity and wonder. Marvel at its intricacies. Grow more familiar with its texture, color, shape, and smell.
* Ask, like Julian of Norwich, “What can this be?” Listen for the response. Imagine where it came from and how it arrived to you.
* See this object as a window into the divine nature.
* See yourself in this item. Ask what is has to teach you about yourself and about God. What wisdom does it have for you?
* You might want to capture any thoughts or insights in your journal.

**The Practice of Paradise**

*“The capacity to cultivate an awareness of hidden wholeness and to live within and on behalf of it is one of the contemplative tradition’s primary contributions to the work of healing the world.”* **The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology by Douglas Christie**

**Prayer Activity: Writing a Prayer of Blessing**

* Prayerfully consider who could use a prayer of blessing and encouragement from you. Spend some time holding this person in your heart with wonder and gratitude.
* How is this person special to you? How have they been a gift to you? Identify a particular trait you wish to emphasize and express how you value that trait. Word pictures can be a powerful way to express that value.
* How has this person made a positive difference in your life and the lives of others? How have you experienced God’s love through this person? Specific instances make the blessing more authentic.
* How will you use this gift in your life? How will it bring you greater wholeness/holiness? How will the world be a better place because of this person? Talk about the potential you see in them and how grateful you are to have them in your life.



**Try this resource for even more inspiration:**

Paintner, Christine Valters. *Earth, Our Original Monastery: Cultivating Wonder and Gratitude through Intimacy with Nature* Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2020.

**Check out the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, KS:** www.mountosb.org