

## Chapter 4. Cleansing the Lens

*Leader:* Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.” Let us confess the way we’ve defiled our church, lives, and hearts with sin.

*People:* Lord, like the temple you cleared, our faith has become cluttered with the things of this world; we have become like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. Jesus, forgive our sins. Drive out all unrighteousness from the temple of our hearts.

*Leader:* Hear the words of Jesus: “How often have I desired to gather you as a hen gathers her brood under her wings!” “Take heart, your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus forgives our sins and calls us to a new life. The law of the Lord guides us in this new life. When Jesus was asked, “which commandment in the law is the greatest?” he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbors as yourselves. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

This is the law of our God.

*People:* Write your law upon our hearts, O God.

### Lectio

True religion is always about love. Love is the ultimate reality. We can probably only see this through real prayer. For love can be hidden. We don’t see it unless we learn how to see, unless we clean the lens. . . . It is the inner discipline of constantly observing my own patterns, what I pay attention to and what I don’t pay attention to in order to get my own ego out of the way. . . . I’m afraid we must learn to observe our own stream of consciousness. This discernment process is often called the third eye or the third ear. It refers to the ability to stand away from ourselves and listen and look with some kind of *calm, not judgmental, objectivity*. (Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, pp. 103-104)

### Questions on Chapter 4

1. “For the most part all our trials and disturbances come from our not understanding ourselves.’ I’m afraid we must learn to observe our own stream of consciousness.” (p. 103) Give some examples of ways in which your response to a situation increased your suffering or disturbance unnecessarily. What can we do to be grateful and joyful at all times and in all places? How can we continuously observe your own stream of consciousness?
2. “The discernment process is often called the third eye or the third ear. It refers to the ability to stand away from ourselves and listen, and look with some kind of calm, non-judgmental, objectivity. . . . My watching and judging don’t change what IS. Prayer, however is not finally self-observation but rather to ‘fall into the hands of the living God’ (Heb. 10:31)” (p. 103-105) Have you experienced “falling into the hands of the living God”? What have you noticed in your body, heart/mind, presence and outer life as you pray?
3. When Richard was in the Kentucky Hermitage, he met an ex-abbot now a recluse for some time. “While walking on a trail path, the recluse said, ‘Richard.’ That surprised me. He was supposed to be a recluse. ‘Richard, you get chances to preach and I don’t. When you are out there and preaching, just tell the people one thing. God is not “out there.” God bless you.”” (p. 117-118) Describe from your own experience and in your own words what you think “God is not ‘out there’” means.
4. “In reality our growth is hidden. It is accomplished by the release of our current defense postures, by the letting go of fear and our attachment to self-image. Thus we grow by subtraction much more than by addition.” (p. 121) Describe in your own words what you think it means to grow by subtraction.

### Meditation: Passions

### Exercise: Watching

*Watching* is the “inner discipline of constantly observing [your] own patterns.” It is a prerequisite for “guarding your heart.” It is frequently recommended in guides to contemplation—and in the Bible (*watch and pray, so that you don’t*

*fall into sin*)—but it is very difficult to change your mental habits. There are various approaches. Mindfulness meditation is related to the *observing* part, and attention meditation—navel gazing, listening to your heartbeat, or repeating a short prayer—can be related to the *guarding* part.

First, we must learn to see what is going on in our heads, and then, eventually, to control our patterns of thinking. One possible concrete method is *centering prayer*. Choose a short name of God, perhaps *God, love, or Jesus*, and use it as a symbol of your love for God, your desire to know God, your intention to give yourself to God. Pray for grace. Then, you say your word, perhaps *love*, and turn your attention and love and self-giving intention toward God, once per breath. Or, if you are very noisy and distracted inside, say a longer breath prayer such as *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* or *I have nothing, I am nothing, I desire nothing but Jesus*.

As you quiet yourself down, any time you notice that you are not giving God your loving intention, but are instead thinking prideful thoughts, or angry, or covetous, or whatever, without getting angry at yourself, simply, gently, turn your attention and intention and love back toward God by repeating your word. As much as you can, keep yourself in a state of loving attention and surrender to God. This has been called *surrender meditation*.

Brace yourself—at first, this is very difficult and painful, because all the garbage on your mind, in your heart, will bubble up to the surface as soon as it has a chance. Notice it (*self-knowledge*)—but forgive yourself as God forgives you and as you forgive your neighbor. Simply and peacefully let it go, saying your word and turning to God. After twenty minutes or so, maybe you will quiet down into loving attention to God. Or maybe not. Your only job is to place yourself in a posture to receive silence—and then be grateful for whatever comes.

This exercise is not appropriate for all times in your life—if you get more benefit from meditative reading, continue that instead, or whatever exercise the Spirit leads you to, if possible in consultation with your spiritual director. But don't confuse *painful* with *not appropriate for you at this time*. You should embrace the pain of self-knowledge because with it comes healing and joy and peace in knowing God.

## Rohr quotes

### *Watching*

1. Our first job is to see correctly who we are, then to act on it. That will probably take more courage than to be Mother Theresa. To be really faithful to that truth is utterly difficulty and takes immense courage and humility. (97)
2. True religion is always about love. Love is the ultimate reality. We can probably only see this through real prayer. For love can be hidden. We don't see it unless we learn how to see, unless we clean the lens. . . . It refers to the ability to stand away from ourselves and listen and look with some kind of *calm, not judgmental, objectivity*. (103-4)
3. In the silence of contemplation, we will observe the process whereby we actively choose and create what we pay attention to. That's why the first twenty minutes are usually so terrible. For the first twenty minutes only primary agenda shows itself. The agenda is how we get our juice, our motivation, what keeps us going. I sit at the Center in the morning, and my mind just starts going: what I need to worry about, what I'm going to do today, what this person is thinking because I haven't answered her letter. On and on and on. Usually about the time we're getting to the possible joy, we get up and get to work. As I stand up, I often realize I haven't let go for a moment. (108-109)

### *Discernment*

4. The wounds to our ego are our teachers and must be welcomed. . . . A contemplative posture faces reality and sees the presence of God. So there is ultimately nothing to fear. (101)
5. I do a lot of spiritual direction, and when I get underneath the language of orthodoxy and obedience, I find a lot of fear: fear of being wrong, fear of being rejected, fear of not being "in," . . . fear of a God who has *not* been experienced. We call it loyalty, but it's often fear. Discernment of spirits helps us recognize what is really happening. (102)

### *Growth*

6. We have to observe, but also *not* let the observer become an accusing tyrant. If we get past that temptation, we no longer ask questions like "Am I pure?" "Am I holy?" "Am I good?" "Is my technique proper?" They all fall away. It starts with mirror-wiping. It starts with doing the discipline faithfully. When the veil parts and we see *love*, the self-conscious watcher, preoccupied with doing it right, just forgets the self. (104)
7. The only people who grow in truth are those who are humble and honest. . . . Humility and honesty are really the same thing. A humble person is simply a person who is brutally honest about the whole truth. (120)
8. Growth in the spiritual life . . . is accomplished by the release of our current defensive postures, by the letting go of fear and our attachment to self-image. We grow by subtraction much more than by addition. . . . Once our defenses are out of the way and we are humble and poor, truth is allowed to show itself. (121)