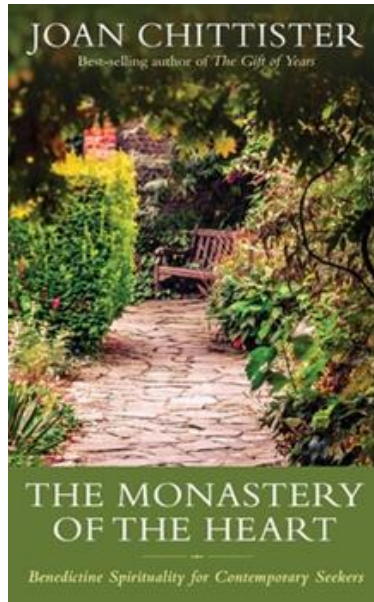


Discussion Questions

The Monastery of the Heart



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Introduction

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this introduction? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Can you share a little about your search for God? What are the questions that “plague your soul” in the pursuit? Would you agree that the “search for God is the attempt to fulfill the incomplete in us.” Why or why not? If so, how has that been true for you?
3. In the last paragraph, the author invites seekers of every kind—individuals, families, small intentional communities-- “to create within themselves a Monastery of the Heart.” Is this something that interests you? Can you imagine yourself doing this? If so, what might it look like? What might it mean?

Chapter 1: A Seeker’s Path

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. “Listen” is the very first word of the ancient Rule written by Benedict. Why do you think the author chose that word? Is it still a good word for seekers in today’s world? Explain.
3. The author writes: “It is a gentle, tender invitation, this call to create within ourselves a Monastery of the Heart.” And she reminds us that in following this call we can start over again every day. This echoes a Tale from the Desert Fathers and Mothers: “Abba Poeman said about Abba Pior that every single day he made a fresh beginning.” React to

“every single day a new beginning.” How important do you think this advice is on the spiritual journey. Why?

Chapter 2: A Gentle Invitation

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Are you a seeker? How do you know? Has your image or idea of the God you seek changed through your life? Have your “spiritual practices?” Explain.
3. At this time in your life what spiritual path do you find best suited to your journey into God? A solitary path? A traditional covenanted community? Or something like A Monastery of the Heart--a network of similarly committed people whose community life is stable but not necessarily daily? Other?

Chapter 3: A Single Vision

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. How would you define the “single vision” that unites all members of Monastery of the Heart?
3. At the end of his life, Saint Benedict saw a vision of “the whole world as a single ray of light.” What does this say to you about how a Monastery of the Heart should view the world? What can a monastic heart bring to the world?

Chapter 4: Prayer

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. The author writes “as regular as the movement of the clock, Benedictine prayer becomes for us the pulse of the day, the rhythm of a life...” Do you feel that prayer is regular in your life? Would you like to pray differently? Do you have any hopes or expectations about your prayer life and your association with Monasteries of the Heart? Explain.
3. The author says that monastic prayer “is not mindless repetition of endless formulas,” but “immersion in the mind of God.” Is that how you view prayer? How would you describe a person who is immersed “in the mind of God?” Or has “put on the mind of Christ?” Explain.

Chapter 5: Silence

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. The author writes, “It is of the essence that in the Monastery of the Heart space for silence be treasured and guarded, sought and made sacred...” How do you feel about silence? Is it essential or peripheral to your life? Do you “make space for silence?” When? How? Why?
3. The author lists many benefits of silence. Find one that speaks to you and explain why you chose it. Can you think of times when silence is not beneficial? Discuss.

Chapter 7: And Earth...

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Lectio usually involves a slow reflective reading of the Scripture, meditating on the word as it applies to your life, opening your heart to God in prayer, resting in God and then taking the Word into the marketplace. Do you pray with the Scriptures? How? Why? Why not? Is Lectio a prayer style that you are attracted to? Want to know more about? Discuss.
3. Some have expanded the notion of Lectio to include sacred reading of all of God's Word—nature, art (music, poetry, literature, painting, etc.) and the events of daily life. Is this a form of lectio that you are attracted to? Want to know more about? Discuss.

OTHER VOICES OF WISDOM—DANIEL J. HARRINGTON (America Magazine)

Lectio divina is Latin for “spiritual reading.” It is a method of reading and praying on Scripture and other classics of spirituality like Augustine’s Confessions and The Imitation of Christ. It has deep roots in the history of monasticism. There are four basic steps in lectio divina: reading (What does this text say?), meditation (What does this text say to me?), prayer (What do I want to say to God through this text?) and contemplation or action (What difference might this text make in my life?).

The text to be read can be long or short. And the full process of “reading” could take 15 minutes or be spread over 15 years.

For individuals and groups just beginning the practice of lectio divina, it may be wise to follow the four-step outline rather mechanically. But

I must confess that I now seldom consciously work through the various steps all in one time period. In fact, the point of lectio divina is to foster an immersion in Scripture so that the various questions arise naturally in their own time. For one who has been privileged to study, teach and write about Scripture for many years, the framework has become so habitual that eventually all the steps get covered in one way or another. A wise teacher once told me, “When you have mastered a method or skill, then you can throw away the instruction booklet.”

Chapter 7: Retreat and Reflection

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. The author writes, “ In a Monastery of the Heart the Benedictine soul learns always to return to the cave of the heart where the superfluities of life do not distract from the significance of life.” How do you feel about entering the “cave of your heart”? Willing? Eager? Reluctant? Discuss.
3. How do you build retreat and reflection time in your life to “freshen the embers and stoke the flames” of your spiritual quest?

Chapter 8: Mutuality

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. How does a Monastery of the Heart community differ from a more

traditional form of community? How is it the same?

3. Would you agree with the author that it “takes a great deal of energy to create community”? Explain by speaking from your own experiences of creating community.

Chapter 9: Equality

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. The author clearly values the presence of wisdom in every individual and challenges the community to let the Spirit move in and through each. How does this compare to your own experience of decision-making within the groups in your life?
3. React to this statement: “Equality, the offshoot of humility, sees in the face of the other—all others—the face of God.”

Chapter 10: Spiritual Direction and Counsel

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Have you experienced, worked with, or observed leaders who are “faithful to immersion in the Spirit and open to the presence of God in the mind and soul of the community”? What difference would they make in the growth and development of the community they serve?
3. Sister Joan states that authority in a community resides in Scripture, an individual(s), or in the group itself. Examine the communities that

you have been part of (family, parish, intentional community, religious order) and determine where the authority resided and what happened as a result...what were the strengths and dangers in each model.

Chapter 11: Sufficiency and Sharing

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Explain your understanding of the author's statement: "Benedict's definition of the relationship between persons and things is sufficiency, not frugality."
3. How does the concept of living "with one eye on the needs of everyone else as well as your own" compare to your concept of simple living? Describe some specific ways one's life could manifest the concept of common sharing described in this chapter.

Chapter 12: Nourishment

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. How do you feel about food and drink? Do you regard it as: Sustenance? Enjoyment? Temptation? Health? Pleasure? Other? How did you develop this attitude? Finish this statement: A Benedictine attitude toward food and drink is...
3. With so much unemployment, homelessness, hunger and poverty in

our world, what can your Monastery of the Heart do to see that “the hungry around us too, are also full”?

Chapter 13: Good Work

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Do you agree with the author that the labor of your hands, your “work for the sake of hastening the coming of the Reign of God is every bit as much a part of Benedictine life as prayer times and holy reading.” Why or why not?
3. How does the work of your hands – your manual labor – “make the world a better, more just, more humane and fairer place for everyone”?

Chapter 14: Co-Creation

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Do you “hold all things – the earth and all its goods – as sacred”? Explain.
3. In your daily life and lifestyle, how do you reflect the call that “co-creation ... requires us to tend the land, and conserve the waters, to till the garden and protect the animals, to use the things of the earth in ways that enhance all life now and preserve them for later generations as well”? How might you be even more committed to this call to co-creation in the future?

Chapter 15: Loving Care

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. The author writes that “patience and care” are the two pillars of a monastic community. Give one example of how you and/or your community show patience and care when addressing an issue, a person, a group of people.
3. The Rule of Benedict lists special concern for the most vulnerable in the community: the elderly, the sick, the young in community. Given today’s world, would you add any other “vulnerable” to the list? Why would care for the vulnerable be so important for Monasteries of the Heart? Explain. How can Monasteries of the Heart reach out to the vulnerable?

Chapter 16: Responsibility

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. When it comes to a choice between the structure or the person, monastic spirituality puts the person first. Name one institution, one structure that you are involved in and ask yourself if, in time of conflict, the person had precedence. Discuss.
3. The author claims that monastic spirituality is “a different way of being in the world” because it gives of itself freely to others beyond what is required ... beyond a 40-hour week ... beyond the mentality of paid service for contracted hours ... beyond being off duty from the

needs of others. Is this idea too radical to be real? Discuss. How does this compare with modern advice to care first for self, to lead a “balanced” life, to the adage that “my time is my time,” that too much self-sacrifice is harmful to the self?

Chapter 17: Hospitality

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. The word hospitality is rather common these days – it is used, for example, to describe fine hotels with the finest products and the finest services. How does Benedict’s concept of hospitality shake up and disturb this more common understanding of hospitality?
3. When is the last time someone “disturbed your perfect life”? What was your reaction to the disruption?

Chapter 18: A Listening Heart

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain
2. Compare the word “obedience” to “holy listening.” How do you react to each word?
3. The ancient Rule, the author explains, calls us to mutual obedience. Remember all the times when you were “obedient” to someone or someone was “obedient” to you: parents, children, teachers, military personnel, church leaders, a spouse. What was positive about these

experiences? What was negative? What do you think healthy mutual obedience would look like in community or in family relationships?

Chapter 19: Conversion of Heart

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Benedictines have traditionally taken a vow of “conversion.” After reading this chapter how would you explain the monastic promise of “conversion of heart” ?
3. The author writes that conversion of heart comes when “we finally realize that all things are of God...all things call us to melt into one great paean of praise for the joy of having found the God we continue to seek.” How does monastic spirituality invite you to that point of conversion? How do we learn to praise God for the whole gamut of our lives?

Chapter 20: Stability of Heart

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Simone Weil writes: “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.” Discuss her insight in light of this chapter.
3. Stability of heart, being fixed in the heart of God, is not stability to a place or even to religious practices or institutions. How might you tell

the difference between being fixed in the heart of God and aimless drifting? Are there clues in your own life that help with this?

Chapter 21: Humility

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Which of the twelve steps of humility is most appealing to you? Why? Which of them is most challenging for you? Explain.
3. Humility is the cornerstone of Benedictine life. How have you defined humility in the past? After reading this chapter, explain if your own definition has changed in any way. If so, how? What place does humility have as we develop our own Monastery of the Heart?

Chapter 22: Spiritual Tools

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. The author states that “Benedictine spirituality is the strikingly powerful middle way between indifference to the spiritual life and extremism in the spiritual life.” Have you experienced either indifference or extremism in your own spiritual journey? Explain. In what ways do the spiritual tools described in this chapter provide a “strikingly powerful middle way” for your own spiritual journey?
3. Do you agree that “to be wholly spiritual we must be wholly

human”? What images or ideas come to mind when you consider this concept?

Chapter 23: Sacred Art

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. Did the connection between art and monastic spirituality surprise you? Discuss.
3. Nikos Kazantzakis wrote, “You have your brush and your colors, paint paradise and in you go.” Reflect on Kazantzakis’s insight in relations to this chapter and Monasteries of the Heart.

Chapter 24: Good Zeal

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Consider the qualities of good zeal listed at the end of this chapter. Which one appeals to you the most? Challenges you the most? Explain.
3. What does it mean to you to “prefer nothing in the world to the love of God”?

Chapter 25: Peace

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Move you? Explain.
2. Consider the list of values that the author considers essential to creating peace in our hearts and in our lives-community, prayer, stewardship, equality, stability, conversion, peace-and that they “all make for communities of love.” Does the list constitute a recipe for peace in your opinion? Why or why not?
3. As you have been about developing and shaping your own Monastery of the Heart, does it seem to be for you and for others an “oasis of human peace in a striving, searing, simmering world”? Share your reflections on the possibility of such an oasis in your heart and your home.

Chapter 26: Epilogue

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your first reaction to this chapter? What words, images, and ideas were meaningful to you? Did it raise any questions? Did anything surprise you? Excite you? Concern you? Explain.
2. The author states that Benedictine spirituality is a lifestyle that is the “work of a lifetime.” How does that make you feel? Hopeful? Depressed? Challenged? Relieved? Grateful? Other?
3. Now that you have read this way of life for Monasteries of the Heart, what would be most helpful for you to continue your journey? What information? What experience? What opportunities? What practical aids?