



FIRST-SUNDAY CONTEMPLATIVE SITTING

JANUARY 2022

HOPING

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.¹

This stanza of Emily Dickinson's poem offers us a rich metaphor about hope.

A bird suggests something light but strong, perched, and attentive, singing **without words**, and never giving up.

With the beginning of a new year, we might have wishes about what it will bring. We are in the process of preparing for a General Chapter. We have prayed for the ability "to risk the transformative change that is being asked of us."² We may think, "yes, but" We may count on this or that specific outcome. We may have expectations that are locked in.

And yet, the metaphorical bird sings without the words. Being hopeful and expectant requires that we suspend the object of the hope. The readiness for a new reality which calls us to transformation asks that we are ready for an unknown outcome, confident that it will be life-giving, even though it may call us to grow, study, think creatively.



Photo by Ann Marie Wood, OP

We commit to hope without the words. "The Spirit makes a prayer out of our wordless sighs."³

There may be times in our everyday lives that appear to have no future, no hope for new life, new insights, new excitement. Dickinson's reminder is that hope resides in the human soul and is capable of persistent readiness for new outcomes.

Spend some time attending to your hope. What is the bird singing expectantly in your soul, knowing that God knows the prayer for which we haven't found the words? Expect surprises.

¹ Dickinson, Emily *101 Great Poems: Dover Publications, Inc. 1998*

² Siemen, Patricia *Awakening, Despertar, Pagkamulat Prayer for General Chapter*

³ Adapted from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene H. Peterson

CONTEMPLATIVE SITTING

*Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness
and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life.*
– Thich Nhat Hanh

Contemplative sitting is an invitation to

- attend to your thoughts, feelings, and emotions with an open heart.
- offer/dedicate your everyday experiences, be they joys or sorrows, comforts or discomforts to the care and safety of others.
- gently shift patterns of behavior that do not serve you or others well.
- become more and more a presence, a being of loving kindness and compassion.
- dwell in Holy Mystery.

Mindfulness Practice

Set a time of 10, 15, 20 minutes, or more. It is helpful to have a set time for meditation. Sitting in your chair or resting in bed, come gently come into the present moment. Begin noticing any sounds around you like voices in the hall, a bell ringing. Gently hear the sounds and let them pass on by. This is Mindfulness of Sound.

Then gently focus and concentrate on your breath.

- Begin with taking three breaths, just normal breaths, breathing each one in and out. Gently keeping focus on your breath; you may feel it at the tip of your nostrils or sense the movement in your chest or abdomen. If you can't feel it, place your hand on your chest or abdomen and breathe in and out.
- Each time the mind wanders, take note of where it went, and gently return to the breath. If you do this 100 times, it is just fine!

Simple Practice

- Breathing in, I calm my body, breathing out I smile,
Breathing in present moment, breathing out precious moment.
- Breathing in Holy Spirit, breathing out aah.
- Breathing in the universe, breathing out amazement.

Awareness of your mindfulness experience is key. Awareness of being distracted, or anxious, or crabby, or peaceful, or happy is key with no self-blame or judgment about your experience. Awareness is key!

My responses to this First Sunday reflection:

