NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Spirituality: The great balancing act

Rich Heffern | Dec. 17, 2010 Eco Catholic

When we open the ancient overflowing tool box of our Catholic spiritual tradition, we find nestled within many reliable implements that have stood the test of centuries of use in the work of creative inner integration and soul crafting.

What are some of those ancient tools? Patience, silence, incubating darkness, the wonderful yeasting action of prayer, wise and careful discernment, the adventure of striving for simplicity, meditation techniques, centering prayer, the not-so-easy art of letting go, the simple craft of mindfulness, the call to the death-rebirth dynamic of the cocoon, the cultivation of a deep contemplative attitude, fasting, and the endless and arduous mystery of forgiveness.

Once we have these tools at hand, where can they be put to work? Where else but in our everyday life?

We do not naturally connect spiritual exercise with the humdrum comings and goings of our existence here and now. Out of old habit, we identify the practice of spirituality with white flowing robes and far-off places that reek of incense and candle wax ? a monastery, a retreat center, or a misty landscape somewhere, empty of the routine and everyday. We wait for bewitching music, swelling cascades of quivering violins like we hear in the movies, to cue us that this is a sacred moment. We over-romanticize spirituality, push it out of reach, waiting for just the right moment and occasion. We tell ourselves that it can?t happen here, right in the living room with the kids and the television on, or in the office with the boss hovering over my shoulder and spreadsheets sprawled across my desk.

Nevertheless, it is our ordinary life that is the matter that we are to transform into wholeness with the alchemy of spirituality.

It is an exhilarating truth that every moment, every experience, at whatever time or place, can serve as spiritual exercise. The realm of the sacred is in the nitty gritty of every day.

A few years ago my teenage stepson wanted a car. His request for help put me into an uncomfortable, ambivalent place. Though convinced excessive driving is environmentally destructive, though I?d just written a book praising the virtues of ecological responsibility, I could also see that boredom and immobility would have been corrosive to his spirit at an important time in his life. Further, he needed some breaks in a life filled with mishaps and trials; he?s worked hard in school and was willing to work for the car?s upkeep.

I decided to give him a loan. Though I?d like to report that this deliberation proceeded with great-souled equanimity and grace on my part, alas, that was not the case. Kicking and screaming all the way, I found myself dragged through a dilemma that in the end resolved itself and resulted in growth both for me and him. The problem had cornered me, forced me to let go of some pet agendas and open myself to a wider vision and wisdom.
It was the late, great Dr. Seuss himself who said: ?Life is the Great Balancing Act!? Sorting through these difficult dilemmas, working out the necessary compromises, and finding practical, workable solutions to knotty,

seemingly intractable problems, I?m convinced is true prayer, close encounters with divine mystery working in our lives.

It is the painful arena of upset plans, nagging selfishness, tricky challenges, slippery banana peels under the feet of our easiest posturing, the arena of self-emptying and surrender, where we are at once most human and most in touch with God.

This is sacred work. Sometimes we must hold two equally balanced and strenuous tensions within us at the same time. When this happens ? hard as it is to maintain ? it is a very holy moment

---

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-30 00:41*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/spirituality-great-balancing-act