

MARCH 24, 2016

AGAPE

A warm welcome to this celebration of Agape, compassionate and unselfish love; we're here to nourish a sense of union and communion with one another and the divine that is in and around us. We'll use the now traditional format of remembrance, prayer and community – the three Gs: *Gedanken, Gebet und Gemeinde*, like our TGD friends will be doing in Stuttgart in a few hours' time. And we'll share a meal.

We'll begin by opening our hearts and minds to the Cosmic Spirit, settling into deeper awareness as we listen to Be still for the presence of the Lord is here. Listen for the presence, the glory and the power and be open to inspiration and whispers of the Divine Love which enfolds and connects us all.

CD: Aled Jones, Higher, Tk. 9 (3:02 mins)

Remembrance

The word "agape" became associated with early Christian communal meals, which were to fill the hungry poor and to strengthen the bonds of community. The origin is the Jewish Seder feast before the Sabbath, which is especially solemnly festive before Passover and this is still celebrated today, in remembrance of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, helped by Yahweh, their God whose name they dared not speak.

I was interested in the Chief Rabbi of the U.K., Jonathan Sacks' thoughts about ritual acts.

ELDER HERTA UHLHERR

Templers long ago dropped ritual acts that they deemed empty show, but have reinstated the Maundy Thursday Liebesmahl, which was celebrated in our communities in Palestine. Also, as Hermann and I recently learnt from a Warte extract of 4.2.1886, a communal thanksgiving meal was held in Dresden to bond the scattered Saxon Templers in the spirit of unity. Hermann's great-grandfather Hachenberger reports they sang *Danket dem Herrn* (Psalm 106) as we did at Sommerfest before we had our community picnic recently.

Rabbi Sacks writes: "Meaning is made, not discovered... Religion for the most part is the constant making and remaking of meaning, by the stories we tell, the rituals we perform and the prayers we say. Religion [religio] is an authentic response to a real Presence, but it is also a way of making that presence real by constantly living in response to it – 'truth translated into deed'". People are transformed by doing that, and the world is different when, for example, we practise the teaching of loving God and your neighbour as yourself. Ritual has been called an act of meaning-making. As we remember by enacting this agape, we are nourished and somehow changed (but not with Eucharistic transubstantiation magic).

Retelling the story with words, symbols and music keep the memory alive and helps to illuminate the stories of our individual lives. It also binds us

together, just as the Seder meals do for the Jews before Passover.

After the shared meal in Jerusalem, Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray, knowing full well that his protests against the callousness and injustice of the High Priest and the Roman occupiers were about to destroy him. As he agonises in the garden, he asks his disciples to keep watch and to pray with him, but they are exhausted and fall asleep. Have we sat vigil with someone, anxious, afraid, praying, hoping against hope?

Note our olive branch, symbol of peace and our Templar connection to Palestine – and we remember the ancient olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane. We'll hear from Taizé: *Bleibet hier und wachet mit mir*.

CD: Gesänge aus Taizé, Bleibet hier, Tk. 10 (3:32 mins)

Darkness belongs naturally to the human condition, since we are not yet pure Spirit and Light. It's hard to accept, but most of us have times when we must live through dark times and endure them. Is someone you know going through a dark time at the moment? We send all those suffering – including refugees and those newly bereaved in Brussels – light and love. And we remember tomorrow's crucifixion with Lotti's rendering of it, as part of the Credo: he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried: *crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est*. A very dark time, symbolised by the dark music, the cry of the sopranos, and by the sun being darkened from the 6th to the 9th hour in Matthew's narrative.

CD: The Sixteen Miserere, Crucifixus, Lotti, Tk. 1 (3:10 mins)

Someone close by, watching and mourning, was Jesus' Mother Mary. We'll hear Pergolesi's *Stabat*

Mater dolorosa, a "duetto grave", heart-rending. The German translation of one verse says:
Angst und Trauer, Qual und Bangen
alles Leid hielt sie umfängen,
Das nur je ein Herz durchdrang.

CD: Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*, Tk. 1 (4:38 mins)

It's time to light tapers to make some more light (it was still light outside).

Prayer

Jesus often withdrew to pray or meditate – to draw guidance and strength from the divine Power within and around us. Being still and mindful of our oneness with the unifying, creative Power of the universe can empower us to carry on, to do our best, to keep loving, to be brave, gentle and patient and to do what needs doing, even in times of great stress.

Let us send light, love and energy for their highest good to people we know who need support – to uphold them on their soul's journey. Then light and wisdom and compassion also to our leaders, our community and the planet – it's a way of affirming to the infinite Love and Intelligence we believe permeates the universe: Your will be done, even if we don't understand why this is happening in our lives. Seeing ourselves in Light helps us tap into the flow of creative energy that makes it possible for us to do what we are able to do to perhaps make some people's lives better, despite our obvious limitations, and to realise a little bit at least of "the kingdom of God".

Often we may feel powerless to help someone, but there is perhaps comfort in believing that our loving them blesses them somehow. We are open to experiencing Love as the living God.

CD: Karl Jenkins, Mass for Peace, Benedictus, Tk. 12 (stop at 5:20 mins)

Community

We value community and have Matthew's words about Jesus (8:20): "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in your midst."

I want to share an insight from Hedley Beare's *Praying in Secret* (TBCE, 1988).

"Thinking about God is better described as contemplation rather than meditation... the Latin word *templor* from which it comes to think or to ponder. Temple comes from the same root. So contemplation implies the kind of pondering that plumbs the depth and breaks through boundaries. It means going into the awesome darkness where things lie hidden." (Worth contemplating some more: ...*Besinnung*... being still and allowing Sinn – meaning – to emerge from the "temple" within)

I'd like to share a progressive interpretation of an Agape meal from Michael Morwood: *Praying a New Story*, p. 143.

We share this meal
as Jesus shared a meal the night before he died.
We take bread as Jesus took bread,
and we remember, as Jesus remembered,
a Spirit of constant presence.

We break and share this bread,
as Jesus broke and shared bread,
and we give it to one another
as our pledge of openness
to the Spirit of Love in our midst,
and as our remembrance of Jesus
who enlightened our minds and hearts
and who was ready to die for what he believed.

We take this wine and drink,
as Jesus asked his friends to drink,
mindful of a relationship of love and trust
between ourselves and the Spirit of Life,

ready to allow that Spirit free expression in all we do.

p. 127: We give thanks for who we are:

- matter become conscious
- the universe coming to reflect on itself
- temples of God's Spirit

We accept our responsibility to work with the Spirit that moved so evidently in Jesus' life to make God's reign evident in our lives and in our world.

Let us join hands for Grace:

We give thanks for so much and ask for blessing on this meal

may it make us strong and cheerful.

Break bread and pass on...

CD: *Echoes of Gold* while we eat.

Conclusion

We've been immersed in music, prayerful remembrance and quiet contemplation (as temples). I hope we feel nourished and empowered by a sense of the holy in and around us, and connected to and filled with agape. May we carry this feeling into our Easter break and into daily life, and shine our inner light to help the "reign of God" manifest in the world.

CD: *Deep Peace*, Tk. 4, *Swoon III*

TGD: Harald will email Grüße in herzlicher Verbundenheit and good wishes for the group trip to Israel.

Present: Renate Weber and Amelie, Gisela Sawatzky, Helga Anderson, Helga Jürgensen, Resi Schwarzbauer, Harald and Christine Ruff, Herta Uhlherr – all very glad to come for the special atmosphere and the glorious music.