

# MYSTICAL WORD

*Mystical Word is a weekly reflection based on the Sunday Gospel reading, written by L.J. Milone, Director of Faith Formation at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, Washington, DC.*

*Mystical Word for Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024*

*The Resurrection reveals our radical unity with God.*

Why are you in church today? Why did you come? I wonder if people come because they think it's their duty, because of family expectations, or because it's a tradition. These are fine reasons, but they miss the mark of what our faith is all about. The Catholic faith is not about membership or family traditions. Rather, its purpose is transformation. We celebrate the Resurrection today, and the Resurrection means God wants to change us into something new, holy, and whole. Resurrection means transformation. It is a mystery I would like to probe with the help of a truly great Christian mystic, the medieval German Dominican preacher Meister Eckhart.

Meister Eckhart lived from 1260 until about 1327 in Germany. He was a Dominican priest and was both as highly educated and as highly esteemed as the great Thomas Aquinas. Eckhart was a capable

administrator for the Dominican Order and a respected professor of theology at the University of Paris. Because of both his education and his spiritual wisdom, he was known in his day and is known in ours as a Master or, in German, Meister. He is remembered mostly, though, for his sermons, which he gave to a mostly lay audience. Eckhart preached many sermons, and these contain the bulk of his radical message of our transformation and unity with God.

In his thirty-eighth sermon, Eckhart preaches, "If someone were to ask me: why do we pray, why do we fast, why do we all perform our devotions and good works, why are we baptized, why did God, the All-Highest, take on our flesh? then I would reply: in order that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God. That is why the whole of Scripture was written and why God created the whole world and all the orders of angels: so that God could be born in the soul and the soul in God."

The birth is how Eckhart describes the change God wants to take place in our lives by raising us up like Jesus. Through the


birth, God becomes real for us, alive in our minds and hearts. Birth symbolizes spiritual awakening, becoming Christ, and integrating unity with God into our lives. As Michael Demkovich, a commentator on Eckhart says, "Birthing allows something that is within to come to life...allows the reality of God that is already in us to come to life in us." Birthing, then, functions as a symbol of transformation. Through this birth God unveils our inherent Christ-nature. It is the bringing forth of what is within us – unity with God – into everyday life. This changes us.

But, if we are honest with ourselves, we don't want to change. In general, we don't like transformation. We are comfortable with our lives as they are, even if we are suffering. If we consider the disorientation we experience when our usual route to work has a detour, we can verify this truth: we don't like to change. All of us tend to have our own ways of doing things. Admitting this, namely that we don't want to change, is the first step to changing. That takes willingness. Eckhart says, "God works...as he finds willingness." If we are open, we can consent to God changing us. This is what Resurrection means. God takes our lives, if we hand them over, to transform them. Change doesn't demand heroic effort and willfulness as much as willingness and surrender. This is one of the important wisdom lessons from Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection.

We can't do it, but God can, will, and does. All we can do, according to Eckhart, is get out of God's way. We must practice detachment, letting ourselves go. Eckhart says, "God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction." God is not asking you to do more church-related, pious, or devotional

things. In Eckhart's words, "God wants no more from you than that you should...go out of yourself, and let God be God in you." God will be born in us when we are detached, in a state of letting go and letting be, that is, when we have subtracted selfishness from our lives. Then, God comes alive in us. God becomes obvious to the one who has learned the art of detachment.

We have to remember something, though. It's not all on us. For Eckhart, the good news is that God is one with us. So, we can change with God's help and if we are but willing. If we are open to letting go of what we want and what we think we need to be happy, then the birth reveals what is and has always been true: our radical unity with God. Such is the life of the Resurrection.

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