



BIBLICAL Reflection

He Is With Us Durians and Stars!

by Ng Wai Ling

It was the first evening of a quiet retreat up in the hills. In the silence, we savoured kampung durians, a seed at a time. Above us, we saw a million stars! The splendour, beauty and intricacies of God’s handiwork being displayed across the skies was a sight to behold. More than for the eyes, Immanuel’s—God with us—labour of love was a treat for the soul.

During this Lent season, as we prepare to remember Immanuel’s journey to the Cross, let us consider two spiritual practices that can help to grow our awareness of His presence and openness to what He might be inviting us to.

Looking Up—Cultivate Gratitude

Scripture has much to say about the Creator God. The Psalmist reminds us that mankind are mere mortals and that our plans perish on the day our spirit departs. And so Psalm 146:4 exhorts us to place our trust and hope only in the eternal God, the Maker of heaven and earth, whose help is abundant and hope assured.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
(Psalm 146:5-6 ESV)

Turning our eyes towards God is even more crucial when life throws us a curve ball. To the many of Job’s questions about his suffering, instead of giving direct answers, God revealed Himself as the Sovereign Creator of the Universe. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding... On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 6-7 ESV)

In our season of darkness or confusion, casting our eyes on God and His creation can help us reconnect with the truth of who He is towards us. This transcendent God is also a deeply intimate Lover of our souls, simply because we are His creation. Julian of Norwich, a 14th Century anchoress wrote in *The Revelations of His Divine Love* about God’s creation: “There are three attributes. The first is that God made it. The second is that He loves it. The third is that he cares for it.”

A Spiritual Practice

Practice looking up! Ponder the skies, the clouds by day and the stars by night! Find time to connect with God’s creation. Give thanks as you find places and ways God has been faithful. Ask: What am I most grateful to Him about today? How has He been my help and hope?



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Looking In—Cultivate a Life of Prayer and Action

Psalm 146:7-8 continues to speak of who God is:

- 7 who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free;
- 8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

Luke 4:14-21 point to Isaiah's prophecy, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Gospels record extensively the ministry of Christ to the downtrodden as a compelling vision to spur us on as we minister to the poor and marginalised today. While this ministry can be easily viewed as a noble vocation, we must not take lightly the temptations that come with it. We too need to be willing to allow Christ to set us free and give us new sight—daily!

The Jesuits are known for being “contemplatives in action,” meaning they perceive active life feeding contemplative life and contemplative life feeding active life. It is a symbiotic relationship of prayer and action, a life that Jesus Himself lived, all the way to the Cross.

A Spiritual Practice

Practice looking in! Look into our own hearts and allow the Spirit of God to show us what our souls need for this season. As much as we desire to minister to others in need, how open are we to God ministering to us? Where are our own places of unfreedom, oppression, hunger and darkness? Notice your own longings for freedom, life and light. Have an honest conversation with the Lord.

As we learn to look up (and cultivate gratitude) and look in (and cultivate a life of prayer and action), know that Jesus Christ Immanuel, will always be with us. Sometimes it might begin with durians and stars! ■