

Choosing the Prophetic Path

Center for Action and Contemplation Daily Meditation - Sunday, January 1st, 2023 ¹

On this New Year's Day, we invite you to explore the theme for this year's Daily Meditations: The Prophetic Path. We begin with Father Richard's understanding of the theme and what it means to him:

Our Daily Meditation theme this year is called The Prophetic Path, and I don't think it's an accidental phrase. I offer it in contrast to what most of us were trained to think of as Christianity in general—not as a prophetic path, but as a contest, which immediately frames reality in terms of win-lose, winners and losers. The prophetic path says there's a way of moving toward winning that includes losing. It doesn't exclude it. Can we see the genius of that? It's what you've often heard me call perfection as the inclusion of imperfection. Sin is part of the journey towards salvation. Once you hear it, I hope you can say, "Of course, that's obvious!"

Most of us prefer the language of courtroom and judgment and contest, where there are a few winners and lots of losers. This has not served history well. The prophetic path talks about a journey of two steps forward that necessarily continues to include one step backward. That falling, that failing, that suffering—use whatever word—becomes the energy for the next two steps forward. This is wisdom literature as opposed to contest literature. We're going to use the meditations this year to try to illustrate that the Christian way is a prophetic path.²

Father Richard has long described the prophets as those who offer a "third way" beyond competitive, us-and-them thinking:

There *is* a third way beyond fight or flight, conservative or liberal, and it probably is a way of "kneeling." Most people would just call it "wisdom," which is always distinguished from mere intelligence. It demands a transformation of consciousness and a move beyond the dualistic win/lose mind.

We come to this "third way" of the prophetic path only over time. In the words of W. H. Auden, "For the garden is the only place there is, but you will not find it / Until you have looked for it everywhere and found nowhere that is not a desert."³ The gospel accepts this essentially tragic nature of human existence; it is willing to bear the contradictions that are imprinted on all of reality. It will always be a road less traveled. Let's call it "unstable stability"! But for some reason, it is only the *real* stability, because it is a truthful map of reality, and it is always the truth that sets us free. It is contact with Reality that finally heals us. And contemplation, quite simply, is meeting reality in its most simple, immediate, and contradictory form. It is the resolving of those immense contradictions that characterizes the mystics, the saints, the prophets, and all those who pray. The result is always a "third something."⁴

¹ [Choosing the Prophetic Path — Center for Action and Contemplation \(cac.org\)](#) (accessed January 1, 2023).

² Adapted from Richard Rohr, "[Introduction to the 2023 Theme](#)," *Daily Meditations*, Center for Action and Contemplation, video.

³ W. H. Auden, "Advent, IV, Recitative," in *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, ed. Alan Jacobs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 8.

⁴ Adapted from Richard Rohr, "Playing the Prophet Close," in [Contemplation in Action](#) (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2006), 27, 28.

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to the next question and so forth. A person can pass.

Listen to Richard Rohr 7-minute talk about “Choosing the Prophetic Path” on the YouTube link:

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/2023-daily-meditations/>

1. Richard Rohr states, “The prophetic path says there’s a way of moving toward winning that includes losing. It doesn’t exclude it. It’s what you’ve often heard me call perfection as the inclusion of imperfection. Sin is part of the journey towards salvation. Once you hear it, I hope you can say, “Of course, that’s obvious!”
 - a. **What does “there’s a way of moving toward winning that includes losing?” mean to you and how you live your life?**

2. Richard Rohr states, “The prophetic path talks about a journey of two steps forward that necessarily continues to include one step backward. That falling, that failing, that suffering—use whatever word—becomes the energy for the next two steps forward.”
 - a. **Share an experience in your life about taking two steps forward and one step backward and what you learned from that.**

3. “In the words of W. H. Auden, ‘For the garden is the only place there is, but you will not find it / Until you have looked for it everywhere and found nowhere that is not a desert.’... Richard Rohr says ‘It will always be a road less traveled. Let’s call it “unstable stability”! But for some reason, it is only the *real* stability, because it is a truthful map of reality, and it is always the truth that sets us free. It is contact with Reality that finally heals us. And contemplation, quite simply, is meeting reality in its most simple, immediate, and contradictory form.’”
 - a. **Share about what you are truly looking for in life.**
 - b. **What have you found so far?**

Check out and download more small group storytelling reflections and prompts at:

<https://lifesjourney.us/storytelling-in-small-groups-menu/>

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