

GRATEFULNESS

The Heart of Prayer

By

Brother David Steindl-Rast

An Approach to Life in Fullness

To begin, I'm going to paraphrase excerpts from the Forward by Henry J.M. Nouwen, because he summarized, not only the book, but the author so well. "For Brother David, there hardly seems to be a distinction between teaching, preaching, praying and meditating." He experiences a childlike surprise from all of God's gifts, which is infectious. "He knows with his heart and mind that a monk is a monk to say thanks." In the midst of all of the tragedies of our world, he tells us joy and peace is closer than we realize.

The author invites skimmers of this little book to read the alphabetical list of key words at the end. He hopes this will show there's no limit to wakefulness or aliveness. I read these before the rest and found he had written at least a paragraph for each letter so I share a synopsis of the first eight.



Aliveness makes us realize death is inevitable;

Becoming is the knowledge that the only certainty is change. 'In order to arrive at what you are not you must go through the way in which you are not.'(T.S. Elliot)

Belonging is an acknowledgement that the Creator has planted us exactly where we need to be to grow.

Catholic: "Jesus did not exclude anyone or anything. " Communication ordinarily needs a common preface, such as language, but between us and God. It just flourishes with the realization that in our uncovered state we are always in His presence. Contemplation means uniting, seeing and doing.

Death: Every moment of our life we are preparing for the person we are becoming to die. Divine Life is the imminent closeness with God, that I think is most evident in the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Emotions need to have intelligent and moral energy added to them when we pray.

Faith implies the courage to trust.

Fear can be dispelled by bravery even as we feel it.

Give & Take: Life is dependent on breathing air in and out like it is on giving and taking.

Giving: The three forms, giving up, thanksgiving, and forgiving all come from the heart.

God: The heart is on continual and "restless" search to know about and of God.

Gratuitousness: The Universe gives way to living gracefully . The heart is our source of unity with God, others and our whole self.

Hope is what allows us to use our imagination and enjoy life's surprises.

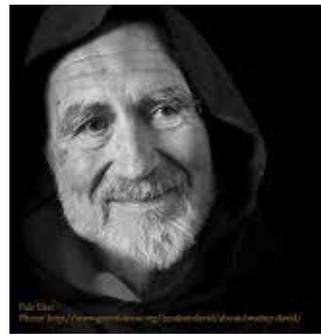


An appreciative wakefulness is the basis of a full life that doesn't allow us to overlook a band of marching ants any more than we could a loudly colored rainbow. The author relates a time when he experienced "near-death" – bombs were dropped on the Austrian street where he was. After the ordeal, he appreciated the beauty of the May morning, the surprise that he was still alive. His description of the grass afterwards emits a poetic view of gratefulness. Even though we can't keep the excitement depth we sometimes feel, we can always find many reasons for an attitude of gratitude each day.

Brother Steindl-Rast explains "it takes a certain intellectual sharpness" to find our gratefulness. Too much negative thinking can retard this venture. Every page holds a respectable nugget of wisdom for living a "fully alive" life. We cannot truly give ourselves this gift so a certain amount of dependence is needed to achieve it. With much depth and philosophy, he explains methods to reach this goal through free of interruption and distraction, as possible, praying.

The journey of faith is compared to starting a summer climb up a snow capped mountain that begins in a lush green field; the difficult work of faith often begins with easy steps.

These take courage, he maintains, whether it's a rainbow or a close brush with death. Even if a thing is expectable, the delight we feel for the first time or again is grace. Intellect, will, humility, acknowledgement, independence, dependence, in certain ways, are some of the feelings involved in living a fully alive life. "Gratefulness makes us young" may be one of the most compelling reasons to thoughtfully read this. It explains ways to captivate us. The depth of his research is exemplified by the variety of other authors he succinctly quotes throughout this endeavor. Other authors noted are the psalmists, Rilke, Oliver Wendell Holmes, T.S. Eliot and Bach to name a few.



"Is not gratitude a passage from suspicion to trust, from proud isolation to a humble give and take, from enslavement to false independence to self-acceptance in that dependence which liberates?"

— Brother David Steindl-Rast

I hope this sparse review whets appetites to carefully read and dwell on each of the pages of this time worthy work.

Book Review by Pat Redick

<http://melkaplace.com>